

CORNELL
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY



FROM

R.S.Hosmer

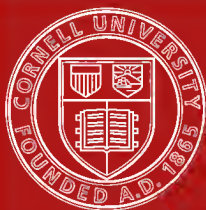
Cornell University Library
arW38432

Sermons for all sects /



3 1924 031 765 674

olin,anx



Cornell University
Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

<http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924031765674>

Mrs. Julia W. Hosmer,
with the kind regards of
Charles D. Bradlee.

SERMONS FOR ALL SECTS

BY

CALEB D. BRADLEE

SENIOR PASTOR OF THE CHURCH AT HARRISON SQUARE
BOSTON, MASS.

BOSTON

W. B. CLARKE & COMPANY

1888

Kc

COPYRIGHT BY
W. B. CLARKE & Co.

1888

Dedicated

TO MY FRIEND OF MANY YEARS

JOHN WARD DEAN

THE SCHOLAR, HISTORIAN, CHRISTIAN

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
1. NEW YEAR'S SERMON,	9
"In the beginning God created heaven and earth."—GEN. i. 1.	
2. THE WINTER AND THE SUMMER OF LIFE,	19
"Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter."—ST. MATT. xxiv. 20.	
3. SEEING JESUS,	29
"Sir, we would see Jesus."—ST. JOHN xii. 21.	
4. EASTER,	40
"When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked."—ACTS xvii. 32.	
5. THE EVERLASTING DOORS,	50
"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."—PS. xxiv. 7.	
6. RESTLESS DESIRE,	61
"Be still."—PS. xlv. 10.	
7. THE GIFTS OF THE PAST,	71
"Other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors."—ST. JOHN iv. 38.	
8. EVERYTHING UNCERTAIN,	81
"Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."—PROV. xxvii. 1.	
9. HOLY TRIFLES,	92
"A handful of corn."—PS. lxxii. 16.	
10. FAILURES AND ANTICIPATIONS,	102
"Not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off."—HEB. xi. 13.	
11. THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION,	110
"Let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, one for Elias."—ST. MATT. xvii. 4.	
12. THE STRANGE INTERMINGLING OF EVENTS,	120
"As if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel."—EZEK. x. 10.	

	PAGE
13. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESENT HOUR,	129
" Now is the accepted time."—2 COR. vi. 2.	
14. MANNERS,	139
" So was the king's manner."—ESTHER i. 13.	
15. THE DECAY OF THE SOUL,	149
" Our lamps are gone out."—ST. MATT. xxv. 8.	
16. JESUS CHRIST THE TRUE FOUNDATION,	161
" Other foundation can no man lay than Jesus Christ."—1 COR. iii. 11.	
17. DEATH IMPOSSIBLE,	171
" Thou shalt not die."—JUDGES vi. 23.	
18. THE FALLEN STARS,	177
" I saw a star fall from heaven."—REV. ix. 1.	
19. THE RENEWING SPIRIT,	188
" A new spirit within you."—EZEK. xi. 19.	
20. THE BURYING OF THE TALENT,	197
" I was afraid, and . . . hid thy talent in the earth."—ST. MATT. xxv. 25.	
21. GOD A SPIRIT,	206
" God is a Spirit."—ST. JOHN iv. 24.	
22. LONELINESS,	215
" I am left alone."—ROM. xi. 3.	
23. GOD KNOWS,	224
" The Lord God of gods, he knoweth."—JOSH. xxii. 22.	
24. THE DEATH OF THE YEAR,	235
" As yesterday when it is past."—PS. xc. 4.	
25. THE SELLING OF OUR BIRTHRIGHT,	244
" Esau despised his birthright."—GEN. xxv. 34.	
26. WALKING WITH GOD,	255
" Enoch walked with God."—GEN. v. 22.	
27. THE TRUE SELF,	264
" Look to yourselves."—2 JOHN 8.	
28. SPIRITUAL ARITHMETIC,	274
" Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"—ST. MATT. xix. 27.	

I.

NEW YEAR'S SERMON.

“In the beginning God created heaven and earth.” — GEN. i. 1.

THERE is a considerable satisfaction in believing the words of the text just as they are written ; and however much our philosophy may talk about the eternity of matter, however much our metaphysics may assert that heaven and earth could not begin, and in whatever intellectual jumble or gymnastics or cloudy mystery we may be thrown when we define any point as a commencement, yet our faith rejoices in the feeling, assurance, and comforting benediction that there is no limit to God's power, that there is no rival on God's throne, and that there is no interminable life behind our God. If God and matter be both eternal, then there are two Gods ; and, if matter existed before the Father, then God is dethroned, or we are subjected to a government that has no name, no identity, and no guiding fellowship. Let us then hear with patience, with considerable comfort, and with an earnest joy the declaration, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.”

The first New Year's celebration, therefore, took place at the dawning of creation ; and what a joyous

festival it must have been, what a glorious announcement, what a tremendous profusion of gifts, and what wonders, surprises, and glories were then bounteously revealed! The birth of the sun, moon, and stars, of land and water, of man and woman,—just think of it! What glorious New Year's telegrams God sent to empty space, when He called the world into being! and how grandly He has been renewing, each year ever since, these emblems of His bounty, these types of His love, and these messages of His grace!

Our first animating and prevailing thought on the threshold of the new days should be that every one of us has gifts from Almighty God.

No matter how poor nor how obscure nor how wicked we may have been or are or may continue to be, still many splendid presents are sent from Heaven, bearing our name, awaiting our acceptance and use, and hallowing our daily experience.

Life is given to us with all its privileges, powers, and glories,—a life watched over by angels, permeated by divine inspiration, engirdled by celestial promises, commissioned to perform mighty deeds, and somehow affiliated by spiritual bonds to the Creator Himself; and light is given to us, that our work may be irradiated, our health enforced and encouraged, and our hopes evoked and strengthened; and darkness is given to us for our repose and clearer thinking, and that we may the better enjoy, by the contrast, the days in which we dwell; and mental vigor is given to us, by which we can measure the beauties, bounties, and glories around us, and thus become enthralled by the generous pro-

visions that God has so lavishly made for the enrichment of our culture, the completion of our joy, and the glorification of our souls. Above all, a soul is given to us, by which we can somewhat compare time with eternity, earth with heaven, and rightly measure duty, responsibility, and judgment. Thanks, then, be to God, for these perpetual, holy, and inestimable bounties of life, light, darkness, mind, and soul ; and may we prove our sense of the value of the possession by our fidelity in the use of such a precious, holy, and gracious bestowal !

When we have found that there is a beginning to everything, and that there is a Creator, self-existent, who produced and is producing all things, let us not be in the least troubled about the chronology of the earth. No matter whether the world should be called six thousand or six million or six billion of years old. I have found my God, and I have found the Originator of all these grand mysteries above, around, and underneath me ; and this is enough. I do not want the exact date of the world's birth, for it would be foolish for me to get excited about so trivial a matter ; and it is enough that the earth was born, that it was born in a good time, and that in it are many valuable things, about which we must study, the possession of which we must sometimes appropriate, and the glory of which ought to consecrate our souls. The Book of Genesis was written for some other, better, and holier purpose than to stir up our foolish quarrels about the length of ancient days or years ; and the grand truth that we must gather from this part of the Bible is simply the

fact which its name betokens, and which we have thus far endeavored to set forth,—namely, that there was a commencement. Yes, we are to learn this inspiring truth: that there is a genesis to the Bible, creation, and all things except Almighty God.

God out of nothing created something. Then the duty seems clear that we must constantly create something out of the slight materials at hand.

In every-day matters, how wonderfully the divine law of creation is obeyed! for mountains have been tunnelled, rocks have been cleft in twain, forests have been levelled, rivers have been bridged, space has been annihilated, the atmosphere has been harnessed to wire, the heavens have been invaded, and the secrets there have been somewhat wrested by a telescope, oceans have been navigated, light has been imprisoned and compelled to obey, being turned into a portrait painter, and the earth has been lacerated, scourged, cut, and hollowed, till, tired of the treatment or forced to submit, it has paid its ransom in coal, gold, silver, iron, lead, copper, and in other valuable, attractive, and important minerals.

In fact, human beings, taking lessons from the highest and the holiest source, have done nothing but create ever since creation; and we may yet look also for more wonders, for soon will the balloon be navigated, so that the winds will not overthrow it, nor the tempests conquer it, nor fire destroy it. Ay, soon shall discoveries and inventions not yet conceived dazzle our eyes, excite our gratitude, and fill us with a holy wonder. But, friends, while we have worked upon

material things, have we remembered also our spiritual obligations, and have we created ourselves into noble patriots, heroic Christians, and into the pattern set before us on the mount?

It was easy enough to build a railroad; but it was not so easy to join the heart to the head, so that neither heart nor head should act without the advice, consent, and benediction of the other. It was easy enough to plan the telegraph, thus being able to speak to your friend a thousand miles away, seeking his kind advice; but it was not so easy to establish a communication with heaven, thus speaking to God, gaining His counsel continually, and bringing heaven to earth. It was easy enough to plunge into the earth, disturbing its equanimity, and making it disgorge its treasures; but it was not so easy for us to plunge into ourselves, finding the precious minerals in our own brain or heart, and knowing the value of our God-given natures. It was easy enough to catch light, making it yield a photograph of our features; but it was not so easy to catch spiritual light, making it yield a photograph of our characters so faithfully that we should at once be led to contrition, consecration, and reformation. We might even scale the firmament, labelling the stars, and chronicling their birth, changes, and all the phenomena connected with them; but it would not be so easy for us to scale God's throne, label His mercies, and chronicle their history, and all the wonders that cling to them.

Ah, my friends, I fear we have not attended to the second creation, which has been so graphically described

all through Scripture, under the titles of new birth, regeneration, with other names as grand and as sublime as these. How was it with Jesus? What did he teach us about creating spiritual and mental power, and about making a new heaven and a new earth within our minds and our hearts? Certainly, our Master assured us that there was a beginning to the Christian life, and that each man, woman, and child, by the grace of God, could start that beginning, and could come out of darkness into marvellous light. His very appeals to the people to repent, and his pictures of the shortness of time, the certainty of death, and the reality of judgment, all prove the capacity that rests in each one of us, by aid from Heaven of course, to act from higher motives, to live more divinely, to square earthly conduct by Heaven's measure, and to arch all existence with the consciousness of God and eternity.

It was a happy new year when Jesus dissected human nature, proving how glorious a picture might be made of it, were the different parts and powers rightly interlaced, inwoven, and balanced, and were the whole structure made to resemble somewhat his own nature, which was God's picture, painted for the wonder, gratitude, and applause of all ages. "In the beginning God created heaven and earth."

We have now referred to the necessity that all things should have a commencement, and we have endeavored to show that none but God can be from everlasting to everlasting. And so we would follow out the great truth by asking all on this New Year's Sabbath to rejoice at the fresh chances, opportunities, and privileges

that are offered for a commencement, for a new start on the life-journey, and for the turning over of a nobler, better, and holier leaf in the "Book of Life." We may have made mistakes before,—ay, we may have fallen into a great many slippery places. We may now hang our heads and cover our faces, and cry, Alas! alas! Let us not despond. The past cannot be helped now. That is a sad reality outgrown, that is done and determined; and we must not load our coming days with the burden of other days, nor throw ancient shadows over approaching hours, nor take the poison out of our history, and cause it to blacken, vitiate, and destroy all our future prospects.

What we have done is done, cannot be undone. We cannot rub the record out and write the tablet over, and turn a fact into a fiction; but we can let the past alone, leave it with a merciful God, and not trouble ourselves with it at the present hour.

Let us all start the new journey with no clogs upon our wheels. Let us start it with hope, courage, faith, enthusiasm, and with the solemn resolve that we will become better men, women, and children, in all conceivable ways. I commend you, myself, and all, then, to hope, as I bid you God-speed on your new journey. Do not get easily discouraged, do not make mountains out of mole-hills; and keep patient, quiet, and easy. Laugh a great deal, bid dull care begone, and have such a shining face that people shall mistake you for angels, looking quite earnestly for your wings; and make your presence a sunbeam, your voice a chant, and all about you like the Æolian harp that is

started into melody the most sweet, through the gaze of your benignant countenance. Hope for better times, for better circumstances, and, above all, for a better heart. Hope, though the skies lower, the thunder rattle, the lightning gleam, and although your whole experience appear to be a vast uproar, a terrible defeat, and one tremendous cloud.

I commend you, myself, and all to courage. Do not be cowards simply because you cannot see what is before you; for it is no matter what is before any of us, as long as our spirit is right, our heart is brave, our right arm remains, and God's grace is at hand. Oh, let us not grow pale on account of imaginary dangers through the influence of our foolish surmises, and on account of the empty, vain, and wicked croakings of those whom we daily meet! but let us put our armor on, and then march on undisturbed by the rattle of shot, the booming of cannon, and the hissing of shells, —undisturbed, although all the powers of the infernal regions have combined to bring about our overthrow.

I commend you, myself, and all to faith. Ay, without faith we can do nothing. Let us anchor our hearts on God, join hands with Jesus, and get large supplies of the Holy Spirit. Let us lean upon the Bible, and choose for companions the Patriarchs, Prophets, and the Apostles. Let us have faith in the possibilities that invest our nature, in the grandeur that encircles our destiny, and in the eternity that clings to our influence.

I commend you, myself, and all to enthusiasm. Let

us put fire into our action, galvanism into our muscles, and let a live coal from Heaven's furnace drop upon our hearts. Let us live as if we believed in living; or die, if we must die, as if we were not afraid of death.

I commend you, myself, and all to the solemn resolve of becoming better men, or women, or children, in all conceivable ways. Ay, this is the time for reform; for we have all of us been dead long enough, and the trumpet call of the resurrection is sounding its awful peals, and is bidding us awake to righteousness. The gentle sister whose presence we invoked, perhaps, as the clock was striking twelve on the evening of the last year, the beautiful New Year, is with us now; and she comes with mercy on her face, and, with the greatest confidence in our possible characters, offers the best advice for our souls, and is waiting to hallow our new vows at this sacred hour.

All hail, New Year! Again we bid you all hail! For you bear the olive branch in your hand. Help us to greet coming hours and approaching events in a proper and a religious spirit. Help us to govern ourselves aright, to teach others faithfully, to throw back the gates that open upon the holy mysteries of God's love, and unfold to us clearly the splendor and magnificence and glory of duty well performed, the sweetness and the grace of sufferings nobly and beautifully borne, and the majesty and the eternity of thoughts rightly and righteously moulded. Do not reveal to us those things that must in due time fall into our cup, and do not hold before us a mirror that shall reflect our coming gains or losses; but do what is better: give us the sacred

charm that shall keep away evil spirits, and that shall change disasters into benedictions.

Dear friends, I wish all a happy and most blessed New Year. May Jehovah bless and keep us, and cause His face to shine upon us; and may thousands and tens of thousands of angels watch over and defend us, and on earth may we be continually prospered, and in heaven may mansions be prepared where we shall be forever sheltered! So may God grant through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master!

II.

THE WINTER AND THE SUMMER OF LIFE.

“Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter.”—MATT. xxiv. 20.

I WANT to give to these words mainly a spiritual interpretation, and I hope that they will play around the region of the imagination, hover about the heart, and stir up the deepest recesses of the soul, until we are all strengthened, inspired, and comforted; for it is ordained by a wisdom that never errs, by a love that never grows cool, and by a judgment that weighs eternity as well as time, that at some hour we all must take our flight to another kingdom and to a better home. Oh, may it not be in the winter! That is, may we not march through the ever open gate when we are unprepared, are full of doubt, are covered by despair, and are embraced by sin.

A great many persons pass away from human sight at a time when, according to our earthly wisdom, we feel that they are the least fitted for the change, when we would fain keep them a little longer, teach them a great deal more, and give to them better credentials for their celestial visit; but that cannot be helped now, and they have gone to a merciful God, while to His blessed care we must leave them, feeling that they will

be educated, tutored, and purified in the way most fitting, by the process most kind, and by a spiritual economy that never allows of an ultimate waste or loss or failure. We have nothing to do about the departed, for they have passed into other hands ; but we have a great deal to do for ourselves, and we must strain every muscle of the brain, quicken all the pulses of the heart, and rouse to a keener insight all the eyes of the soul, so that our flight shall not be in the winter, but shall come when we are basking in the light, warmth, and beauty of the glorious summer of a noble faith and of a splendid Christian consecration.

How finely has the other world been called the "Summer Land"! and let us all try to go, as summer birds, into its garden of peace, its groves of plenty, and cathedrals of glory. I want to ask everybody, not with any ecclesiastical austerity, not with any dogmatical intent, and entirely free from a selfish curiosity, but with the most cordial interest for each one's true welfare, with the most sincere desire for the joy of all, and with a sweet, sacred, and tender gaze into the sacred longings of each soul, Are you prepared to die? Or, rather, are you prepared to live, not *here*, but *there*, where the greater part of your existence will be spent, where your years will be eternal, and where your true self will be published? I am considerably surprised at the zeal with which so many strive to get along in this world, and at the amount of time, labor, pain, and anxiety that are spent and endured for that which at any moment they may be obliged to give up, especially when so little attention is paid to the accu-

mulation of that spiritual coin which can always be kept, which never gets tarnished, which is current in the Eternal Kingdom, and which is cordially recognized in the banks of the Celestial City. Suppose that we live to be a hundred years old,—and, ah, how few of the children of God will ever see half of that time!—yet, when the hour comes for the flight, we shall feel that our days were few, and, as we look forward to the billions and the trillions of years that are to be spent in another condition, we shall wonder that we have thought so little of that kingdom that is to have the possession of us for so vast a period. Let me not be misunderstood. I do not wish that any one should be all the time brooding over the future or should neglect the present, and I want that all should banish always a long face and sepulchral tones; for God does not ask for dreamers, but for workers, and we should make but poor specimens of humanity if we gave up all our powers to speculating about the spirit world.

What I ask is, not that we should extinguish the present, but that we should illuminate it. Let us live to-day after God's holy law, and then to-morrow will take care of itself. Only let us remember that there is a to-morrow, into which results must inevitably leap, and which will be tinged somewhat by what we are doing now; and let us carry into our daily deeds the mighty spirit of a holy accountability. We must take care of our family of course, we must attend to our out-door affairs, and we have the obligations of friendship and of neighborhood to greet; but let all these duties be sanctified by prayer, consecrated by a devout

trust, and bound somehow to the throne of Almighty God by cords that are woven by angel fingers. Let us enter upon the work of the flesh, feeling that every action vibrates through heaven, and is there recorded to our honor or to our shame. Let the merchant put at the head of every page of his ledger, — in thought, if not by the written word, — “Thou God seest me”; and let him make every bargain under the inspiration of that august declaration, “Thus saith the Lord.” Let him remember the claims of the distressed, stirred up to benevolence by the apostolic exclamation, “God loves a cheerful giver”; and let him wake up each Sunday morning with the ancient command stereotyped upon his brain and his heart, “Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.” Let the mechanic, the professional man, and every man, woman, and child “seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near,” remembering that He is with us always, even unto the end, — with us in every machine that we make, in every paper that we write, in every word that we speak, and in all our household duties, waiting for our penitence, craving our consecration, and urging us to be faithful. Friends, that our flight may not be in the winter, we must plant a good many more flowers in the garden of our hearts, and we must pull up a great many weeds that are nestling quite complacently in the conspicuous spots of the inner citadel. We must plant chastity, humility, serenity, courage, and devotion; and we must weed up and weed out selfishness and all its kindred sins.

Chastity. “The pure in heart shall see God.” We

must keep the mind, body, and heart clear as crystal. Let us think only great and noble thoughts, feel only high and sacred affections, and bear in memory continually that our bodies are the "temples of God." Nothing can stand in the place of this inward or outward cleanliness, to any avail. Politeness, chivalry, and all their refined associates are but the masquerade of it; and, if we desire an easy, beautiful, and sublime ascent to God, we must be inwardly, outwardly, thoroughly, consistently, publicly, and privately pure. This is the flower that the spiritual gardener calls the jessamine, because it is so sweet, fragrant, and attractive.

Again, let us plant humility. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." This is the lily of the valley, that is so beautiful and so graceful, drooping its head with such exquisite loveliness, and yet shining all the time with a glory that enchants, and somehow festooning the mind and the heart with a sublime attractiveness. It is a small flower,—it will not take up much room,—and can we place it around the edges of our character; but it will challenge more attention, charm more hearts, and sanctify more lives than many virtues of a larger growth. Let us be humble. Why not? Everything we have is loaned; while the loan is on call, and the call, too, may come at any minute. Why, then, should we not keep all high feelings back, and, as is proper for servants and borrowers, wear our honors gratefully, gracefully, and sweetly, ready at any time to have them plucked, and ready at all times to give them up?

Next let us plant serenity. Let us remember that Christ said, "Peace, be still," even to the angry winds and the boisterous waves; and so let us to our hearts say the same thing, amid all the winds and waves of circumstances, as they beat against the little, frail bark of our mortal tenement. One has sweetly said:—

"I know not what shall befall me,
God hangs a mist o'er my eyes;
And at each step in my onward path
He makes new scenes to arise,
And every joy He sends to me
Is a strange and sweet surprise.

"It may be that He has waiting,
For the coming of my feet,
Some gift of such rare blessedness,
Some joy so strangely sweet,
That my lips shall only tremble
With the thanks they cannot speak.

"O wistful, blissful ignorance!
It is blessed not to know:
It keeps me still in the arms of God,
Which will not let me go,
And hushes my soul to rest
In the bosom that loves me so.

"So I go onward, not knowing,—
I would not if I might:
I would rather walk in the dark with God
Than walk alone in the light;
I would rather walk with Him by faith
Than walk alone by sight."

This virtue of serenity is the little harebell that grows under adverse circumstances, and that is found

even on mountain heights. Oh, then, let us be serene, although we may be deserted, although everything seems to go against the grain of our will, and although we may be engirdled with intense pain! yet let us be resolved that nothing shall cast a ruffle across the sweet peace in our eyes, and may our looks always show that we are transfigured by the radiance that is cast upon us from the lights that are hung upon the battlements of the Celestial City. Like the Pilgrim in Bunyan's "Progress," even in our greatest straits let us take out our "roll," and then read Scriptural promises, and take out our musical instruments, and then play divine melodies; and thus giants will be conquered, beasts will run away, ditches will be filled up, rough places will be made plain, while the desert will blossom as the rose.

Let us plant courage. The Psalmist says, "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thy heart." This let us call the snow-flower in the garden, that comes up in early spring notwithstanding the rough weather, that wins us by its beauty when all things else are bleak. We cannot live here without a large quantity of bravery, for there is quite an amount of fighting that we must do all the time. Saint Paul speaks of the armor that we ought to wear; and he mentions the shield, helmet, and shoes. "Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, . . . the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit." That we may use these weapons aright, we must never think of being cowards. We must expect hot shell, look for leaden

balls, and watch for sabre cuts ; but remember we must press on, and press on, until the stirring bugle notes from Canaan's shore shall order a retreat. And may nothing drive us from the field save a peremptory command from the head-quarters that are established in the city of the New Jerusalem.

Let us plant devotion. The Master says, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Well might all the flowers represent devotion,—those that bloom only in the morning, those that turn only to the sun, and those that bend to the gentlest breezes of heaven,—all, all. We must be full of the spirit of worship, would we always be thoroughly prepared for whatever Providence sees fit to send. There is no peace and no joy like that which talking with Heaven will certainly bring. And thus we obtain a chastity that is stanch, clear, comprehensive, and enduring ; we get a safeguard for our humility, by which it is kept from the invasion of all petty tyrants, so that it is encircled with a sure defence that no possible enemy can break down ; and thus our serenity is established beyond a peradventure, being kept ever unruffled, and being made continually sweet, sacred, and comforting ; and our courage is armed with celestial fire, being placed in authority over the artillery of heaven. Yes, devotion is the very mainspring of all spiritual success, while it perfumes the soul that clings to it forever and forever.

But planting, my friends, is not all that we have to do in the garden of the soul : we must also clear out the weeds, so that the whole surface of the ground

shall not be disfigured, and so that no one can say of us, as was said thousands of years ago, "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo! it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down."

There is a little weed that many years ago was imported from Europe by one who, not knowing its nature, thought that it was a very attractive flower. He planted it in one of our country towns, and, lo! our nation now is filled with it; while it falls by the thousands and by the tens of thousands each year under the relentless plough. Let that weed typify the monstrous sin that swarms in all the gardens of the human heart, caused by improper self-seeking; for out of selfishness all wrongs are apt to spring, all pains are sure to come, and everything bad and unholy will constantly spring forth. Ah, friends, we must look out for the good of all,—yes, the good of the whole, although we may only be able to bring about that grand result through great, terrible, and heart-rending tribulation.

"Pray that your flight be not in the winter."

I have endeavored to show you, my friends, what will make your lives always a happy and holy summer season, so that, when you are called to "go up higher," it will be when the air is redolent with the music of the birds, fragrant with the breath of the fields, cheerful with the light and the heat of the sun, gorgeous with the splendor of the flowers, and every way peaceful, enchanting, and glorious. But this can only come when you have made yourselves in life and in mind

and heart, in soul, and all through and through, a Christian after the true pattern. But it will come, and with a splendid magnificence, with a holy echo, and with a joyous apocalypse, when you are really a child of God, and when you are without any doubt a disciple of Jesus, and when all that see you cannot help knowing that you are encompassed and glorified by the graces of the spirit. You must be a religious man, or a religious woman, or a religious child, would you take your flight thus pleasantly. The conditions are easy, the promise is great, and the reward is sure. Employ some one who will show you how to trim your garden, find some one who is expert in the knowledge of the chemistry of that kind of soil, and look out for one who can tell the nature of each plant,—how it grows, what size it should attain, what garment it should wear, and what flavor give out,—and take one who knows when to trim, when to enrich, and when to pluck. Take one who has studied sunshine and clouds, night and day, and one who is thoroughly acquainted with all the different powers of the varying seasons. Then you will surely reap a glorious harvest. Do not say that such an expert cannot be found, and do not exclaim that it is too expensive for you to look him up; for He is to be had for the asking, “without money, without price.” And you know very well that such is the promise, such the privilege, and such the benediction reserved, offered, and pressed upon all the children of God.

Is it not written, and have you not read it, and will you not read it a great many times more before you take your flight, “Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened”?

III.

SEEING JESUS.

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”—ST. JOHN xii. 21.

I AM not in the least surprised that those Greeks whom the words of the text commemorate wanted to see Jesus, and we should have had the same wish, had we lived in their day; and, even now, some of us feel that those who did see him had the advantage over the believers of future ages. When one appears upon the stage of life, and accomplishes great things, there is a natural desire to gaze at such a person. Indeed, the uppermost question upon everybody's lips is, “How does he look?” Not only do we want to know the color of his eyes and the cast of the countenance, but we also desire to understand all about him—all about his manners, speech, and the general impression that he conveys. Tell us all about him, we say. Oftentimes, also, when we see merely human beings, we are disappointed, as we find out the truth; for the reputation, in some cases, is far ahead of the reality, and entirely out of keeping with a man's bodily presence. In fact, in many cases, and in a majority of cases, we get more out of a man by never seeing him than we should if we were in his presence every day

of his life ; for familiarity has a tendency to rub off and to tarnish respect. Great as George Washington was, he is greater to-day than he was one hundred years ago. Read of one's doings, study one's works, admire one for that which you know he is really worth, and then no matter if you never meet him ; for you have secured all you want from him, possess the best part of him, and he is doing for you all that God meant that he should do. His mind and soul belong to you ; and is not that enough ? You tell me that the disciples of old were more favored than the Christians of this day, because they were so constantly with the Master, could hear him talk, could talk with him, mingle with him at the festive board, walk the streets at his side, sail on the water in his company, and were always within reach of his influence. What opportunities, you exclaim, they had for obtaining a spiritual life, what glorious advantages were theirs, what exquisite benedictions, and how happy and favored they were ! Oh, if we had been there, we would never have felt doubts, shed tears, had any trouble whatever, and we should have been good right away, and right earnestly. But now, you add, we are in the twilight of revelation, and now ages have passed since that beautiful voice charmed the air and that majestic presence sanctified the earth. Now we have to take our faith at second or third hand, and have to sift documents, balance probabilities, and remove a great deal of rubbish, while, after all our search, we are covered with mist. Why was it that we were left so bereaved ?

But such thoughts are erroneous, such reasoning is

a mistake, and such complaints are both weak and wicked. We are as much favored as were the disciples,—ay, more so. Of course, we cannot behold Jesus in the flesh, take him by the hand, and walk the fields with him. But I do not see that this kind of intercourse accomplished what it should with those who enjoyed it; for it did not make them more humble, sacrificing and devout. “They all forsook him, and fled.” Not till they communed with him as a risen Lord,—just as we can and do this day,—not till then were they helped, inspired, fortified. Buckminster once said something like this: “If you please, compare the age in which you live with the darkness and the corruption of the age that gave birth to the disciples. And will you exchange the general purity of manners, and the wide-spread influence of the Church, and the high tone of society to-day for the profligacy of the Roman court and the superstition and the hypocrisy of the Jewish Sanhedrin?” “Just to see Jesus in the body and not to understand him,—in fact, rather to misunderstand him,—for the sake of this will you wipe civilization away, will you blow out progress, will you go back to heathen gloom? I think not, for you have been treated much better than the early believers. You have the privilege of witnessing the indorsement of Christ and Christianity in the sublime effects of their working through hundreds of years. You have seen superstition crumbling before their tread, sin shrinking abashed from their presence, and hearts humbled, cleansed, and cheered by their benediction. You have seen death play the coward, the grave blossom into beauty, trial

shine with diamond brightness, time put on the garb of a holy ambassador, eternity become cheerful, and all the events of life wear a golden glory as Christianity has grown strong. Would you give up this magnificent outlook that is your bounty, privilege, and glory? Would you give it up, and go back to the alphabet of Christianity, and once more misunderstand the great Leader of the Church?"

"To-day, you are safe in believing. You may go where you please and proclaim the word. No one will turn against you. The house of the great will be gladly opened at your coming. The poor will cling to you with a tenderness that is surprising. Your path will be crowned with garlands. It will be like the march of a victorious general who is followed by willing vassals. But, if you go back to the early days of which you speak, you must be willing to be everywhere spoken against. You must expect to be despised by the men of power and influence. You will run the risk of being scorned by the poor. You will have to yield your body to all kinds of pain and contempt. Scourgings the most fearful will be yours, and perhaps at last you will die upon the cross. Do you covet such a destiny? Are you not grateful that the lines have fallen to you in pleasant places? Oh, thank God that He has placed you where the radiance of Christianity must dawn upon your mind, and where the full brilliancy of its glory must flood your soul! Thank Him that you can in quiet count up the triumphs of your Master, and that you may revel in a sweet content among the splendors of his holy achievements."

"We want to see Jesus." Did those Greeks merely want to see a great man? Was it only curiosity that led them to seek the Master? Had they no further design than simply to gratify their eyes? If so, they are to be pitied: their journey was a wonderful squandering of time, and the grandest opportunity of their lives was disgraced and shamed. What! shall they be allowed to look at the Son of God merely that they may go home and have something of which they can boast, merely that they may be able to say, We have seen him, and simply that their foolish pride may be gratified? Oh, no! Such a design as that would have been detected in time, and their request would have been instantly denied. We believe that they approached the Lord with high and holy motives, and with a devout and a serious disposition. They wanted to see, hear, and judge out of honest and devout hearts; they wanted to be made better, and they went to Jesus as pupils with minds humble, hearts pure. They went prepared to love the Teacher, and they were willing to be moved by his kind and gracious speech. Of course, they went with their early prejudices, their false education, and continually hampered by the spirit of the times; for this they could not help. Still, without doubt, they were eager to be convinced, and they were willing to be converted. What those Greeks thought when they beheld Jesus, it is left for the imagination to picture. Perhaps they were disappointed and bewildered! Perhaps everything was different from what they had expected; and yet there must have been a charm about the view much greater than they could

have dreamed. What a valuable period in their biography that day of interview must have been, and how their whole lives must have been sweetened and enriched thereby! We hear no more about them, but without doubt they were among the early believers and sufferers of the Church. All honor to these seekers to-day and forever! Many want to see Jesus to-day, not out of curiosity, not with a teachable spirit, not with docile hearts, not with a reverential nature, not as little children waiting to be led, not because his manners are so impressive, the tones of his voice are so clear and holy, and his precepts so reasonable and pure, —and not because he is so good, so great, and holy. No, but they wish to see him in order to criticise his ways and to call in question his authority. But such a view of the Lord may none of the true children of God seek or desire.

“We would see Jesus.” We say this earnestly, perhaps with a great throbbing at the heart, and with a holy enthusiasm, while the eye is kindled with a sacred light, and when the whole manner is full of a blessed unction. Well, we can see him, and he is not far away from any one of us. Ay, he is very near, and he is close at hand, much closer than if the flesh covered him. Let us not look at him with our bodily eyes, but gaze at him with the eyes of the spirit. Let us call intuition, emotion, imagination, and faith to our aid; for it is not sight, but it is insight, that finds him, and his image is not on the retina of the eye, but it rests on the retina of the soul. He is to be found through his teachings.

We judge of people by what they say or do, and thus we form a right acquaintance. We know a great many persons whom we have never met in the body, simply because we have read their writings, and have tasted of the waters of inspiration out of their golden cup. We cannot say how they look, but we can quickly say what they are and how their souls look; and we feel that they are really our friends, although never a word has passed between them and us. So can we see Jesus. Through his sublime precepts we reach unto a knowledge of his great heart, and we gain this view not only through their beauty, but their propriety also; through not only their purity, but their perpetuity as well. Harmonious these teachings always were, full of a rich melody, with a wise adaptation to all existing needs, and possessing a power that time can never rub out, with a grace that eternity only deepens. They were born in one of the most corrupt ages of the world; but they have a dignity and a glory that even the angels of heaven cannot exhaust, and which God Himself has blessed. As we practise these precepts, as we take them up and incorporate them into our lives, as we wreath them around our hearts, and as we grain them into our thoughts and deeds, so do we behold the Lord. The more we live like him, the more do we apprehend him; and the higher and the higher that we rise to the serene heights of his goodness, all the clearer and stronger is he revealed to us in all the plenitude of his power and in all the wealth of his holiness. As we approach him, he approaches us, grandly and beautifully, making himself known to us until we

righteously glory in the privilege of his companionship. Perhaps some of us say that we cannot understand about the Lord, why he should come to this world, live as he did, teach as he did, and suffer, die, and rise again. Well, reason cannot grasp everything, but the affections ought to feel something. We are not so good as we ought to be, or we should be attracted to the Son of God, and we should be somewhat transfigured by his glory. So let us give ourselves to self-examination. Let us awake to righteousness, put on the garb of duty, march in the Saviour's steps; and, no matter where those steps lead, go to that place bravely, patiently, believingly, enthusiastically, and prayerfully. Then he who was once a stranger will evermore be a friend, and then the amaurosis about our spiritual eyes will be miraculously cured. Only as we see and know Jesus can we see and know God. "He that hath seen me," saith the Lord, "hath seen the Father." I speak now no dogma of theology, nor am I repeating the creed of any church; but I am giving you simply the revelation of Christ himself. Into such beautiful and close communion do the Father and Son come; into such hallowed fellowship are they brought. So congenial are their tastes, so amicable their judgments, and so uniform their desires, that, when one speaks, the other speaks, and, when one acts, the other acts; for they have no separate interests, no divided cares, and their association is the most tender and sublime.

Thanks be to God that He has thus given us His own image through His Son! Thanks also be to Jesus

that he has given us such a glorious portrait of the Father! and thanks be to both, God and Jesus, that we are not left alone in this world! Oh, who would be alone in this thick darkness of materialism, with no pilot to guide amid the reefs and the shoals on the right hand and the left, while passion rages, sin howls, and death makes merry with his victims? Who would solve, unguided, the riddle of time? Who, without a heavenly unction, would disentangle the web of eternity?

"Sir, we would see Jesus." It appears that Jesus was very much gratified when he heard that these strangers wished to see him; for he exclaimed, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." He was pleased that any one thought enough about him and about his message to seek an investigation, and he was right happy to teach any one who might desire to learn. So now is he glad to receive seekers. His great heart is open to all who wish for light; and he is ready to explain his message, to justify his ways, and to make clear his goodness to all that are eager to be enlightened.

Come, then, to this fount of inspiration, this oracle of God, and this emancipator of the soul,—oh, come, and be cheered, cleansed, consecrated, and crowned! Come, and you will find within you a well of living water, that shall spring up into everlasting life.

I think we truly see Jesus when we do good, and this is the best way of seeing him. I once read a beautiful piece of poetry called "Jesus' Seat." Although it is a little long, I will quote a part of it, and then close:—

“Far, far away, o’er the deep blue sea,
Lived a man who was kind as kind could be.
He loved little children, and spread every day
A table from which none went empty away.
Poor children came in from the alley and street,
With rags on their backs and no shoes on their feet,
Girls and boys, large and small, some naughty and rude;
But John Falk loved them all, and did them all good.

“And, while they were eating, he often would tell
Of the Lord Jesus Christ, who on earth once did dwell:
How he loved little children,—each one of them there
He was watching from heaven with tenderest care,—
And how happy and blessed would be the child’s part
Who would let that dear Saviour come dwell in his heart.
Each day, when the children assembled to eat,
He taught them to offer this grace for their meat:
‘Bless, Jesus, the food thou hast given us to-day,
And come and sup with us, dear Jesus, we pray.’

“But once, when the children had finished this prayer,
One poor little fellow stood still by his chair
For a moment, then ran to the closet where stood
The bright cups of tin and the platters of wood.
‘Now what is the matter?’ said Falk to the child.
The little one looked in his kind face and smiled.
‘We asked the Lord Jesus just now in our grace
To sup with us here; but we’ve given him no place.
If he should come in, how sad it would be!
But I’ll put him a stool close here beside me.’

“Then the boy, quite contented, sat down to his food.
He was hungry and tired, and his supper was good.
But, a few moments after, he heard at the door
A knock, low and timid,—one knock and no more.
He started to open it, hoping to meet
The Lord Jesus Christ, come to look for his seat.

But, when it was open, he no one could see
But a poor little child, much poorer than he,—
His face blue with hunger, his garments so old
Were dripping with rain, and he shivered with cold.
'Come in,' cried the boy, in a tone of delight :
'I suppose the Lord Jesus Christ could not come here to-night,
Though we asked him to come and partake of our bread.
So he's just sent you down to us here in his stead.
The supper is good, and we'll each give you some,
And tell the Lord Jesus Christ we are glad you have come.'

"Dear friends, who have read this short story, you know
The words that our Saviour once spake when below.
If we wish for his presence to hallow our bread,
We must welcome the stranger he sends in his stead.
When we set out our feast, this our motto must be :
'As ye do to my poor, ye have done unto me.'"

IV.

EASTER.*

“When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.”—ACTS xvii. 32.

SOME mock now, when we speak of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and they do so on the general ground that there can be no such thing as life after death, therefore they say that this claim made for any one special person is absurd and false, and not to be entertained for a moment. That is, they base their arguments on what they call a general law. Ask them how they have discovered this general law of universal decay, and they will reply, “Through the deductions of common sense, through the reports of every-day observation, and through a careful sifting of the whole matter according to the laws of possibility.” And all this sounds very well; but, if we drain out the real meaning of the words, all that we can gain from them is simply this: We think so, and therefore it must be so. I propose, however, to take up the question of Christ’s resurrection, on this Easter Sunday, not in the light of any poor human guessing, but as I would take up any alleged fact,—according to the proofs that are at hand,

*In the composition of this sermon, I have availed myself of all the arguments I could find scattered along the centuries.

pressed upon our notice, and right before the eyes of the mind and the soul. That is, let us treat this matter as we do any other matter, and, if the evidence be sufficient, believe it; if not, let it go.

In weighing evidence, too, we are to remember that the witnesses must be men of strict integrity. They must be of sound mind, and they must be free from undue bias and prejudice in favor of the truth that they assert. And again, they must be selected, not from any one class of men, but from foes as well as friends; for the cross-questioning of an enemy will sometimes accomplish a great deal toward the building up of a fact. And, once more, the testimony that is given must not be all in the same language, or else it will bear the appearance of a plot; but in the main particulars it must be alike, or else nothing can be ascertained worthy of reliance. And I claim that, in all cases where these rules we have stated can be accurately met, no jury of twelve men would hesitate about a verdict. And I claim that these rules are met, are more than met, in the witnesses for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, therefore that for a reasonable man there is no room left for a doubt about the fact.

Let us look at this a little closely. I presume that, in regard to the characters of the prominent witnesses for the resurrection, we may assume that they were beyond suspicion, from the fact that their integrity was never impeached by their bitterest enemies. And, again, we have a right to judge of men somewhat by what they say and do; and, if they also say and do those things that are straightforward, honorable, holy, and

pure, we cannot help trusting them. And in the same way we judge that such men are of sound mind, since crazy men could not always keep on the square; and, if such men were mad, their opponents would have had a very easy way of disposing of them, and would, without doubt, at once have quickly secured their silence. Such men could not have had any undue bias for, prejudice for, and great leaning toward a truth the upholding of which promised only poverty, disgrace, torture, and death. For this sort of rewards is not usually considered tempting, beautiful, and attractive. The witnesses for the resurrection were not selected from any one class of men, but can be culled from all classes, from the dearest friends, and from the bitterest foes; for we call upon the "high priests," the "Roman soldiers," Pilate, Herod, the centurion, and the mob quite as readily as we do upon John of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the twelve disciples, and the five hundred, for the collateral testimony that forms the splendid links in the grand chain that confirms the reality.

Again, the testimony that we present is all very different, and yet all somehow very much alike; in minor particulars divergent, but in one grand complexion singularly harmonious. Let us arrange our presentation of the case thus: the trial; the crucifixion; the placing of the body in the tomb; the tomb found vacant; the appearance of Jesus to one or to many; and his ascension. In regard to the trial, we have the testimony of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the Roman governors, the Evangelists, and all the Jewish believers

of the last eighteen centuries ; for all agree that someone by the name of Jesus was tried before Pontius Pilate and sentenced to death. And a strange paper has been found in the city of Aquila, in the kingdom of Naples, by some workmen who were excavating the ruins of this buried metropolis ; and, whether the paper be true or false, it at least is a link in the massive items that go to prove that there was a trial. The document is so peculiar, I will quote it :—

In the year 17, of the Empire of Tiberius Cæsar, and the 25th day of March, in the city of the Holy Jerusalem, Anna and Caiaphas being Priests, Sacrificators of the people of God, Pontius Pilate, Governor of Lower Galilee, sitting on the Presidential Chair of the Prætory, condemns Jesus of Nazareth to die on the cross, between two thieves, the great and notorious evidences of the people saying: 1st, Jesus is a seducer. 2nd, He is seditious. 3rd, He is an enemy of the law. 4th, He calls Himself falsely the Son of God. 5th, He calls Himself falsely the King of Israel. 6th, He entered into the Temple followed by a Multitude bearing palm branches in their hands. Order the first centurion, Quillus Cornellus, to lead Him to the place of Execution. Forbid to any person whomsoever, either poor or rich, to oppose the death of Jesus. The witnesses who signed the condemnation of Jesus are, viz.: 1, Daniel Robani, a Pharisee. 2, Joannes Horobable. 3, Raphael Robani. 4, Capet, a citizen.

Jesus shall go out of the City of Jerusalem by the Gate of Struenus.

Contemporaneous history also affords us some clew to the trial of Jesus, or at least gives faint outlines from which we can deduce the fact. Then, again, this trial was announced as a fact at the very time when it was very easy to trace the occurrence. Do you suppose that, if any one should come out in print and

speaking of a trial that happened fifty or one hundred — ay, two hundred — years ago, in Boston, that such account could stand if it were false? Why, all the scholars of the age would ransack all the niches and all the crevices of the past, while the whole truth would at once be sifted out beyond the shadow of a doubt; and especially would this be the case if on the truth or falsity of the statement hung vast interests, the hopes of mankind, and the welfare of millions.

Next look at the crucifixion, for it was not done in secret, and it occurred at a time when the whole city of Jerusalem was crowded; for it was the great Passover season, and everybody must have known about it, and no fictitious statement at such a time, or at any after time, could possibly gain credit. Do you suppose that, if at any of our May anniversaries the best person in Boston should be crucified on Boston Neck, the affair could be kept quiet? Or, if any one now should say that several years ago such an event occurred, do you think that such a statement would be received unchallenged? We must manage this great question in a common-sense, every-day way; and then the evidence will grow brighter and brighter, so that we shall find no way of escaping belief.

Again, great occurrences took place on the departure to the spirit world of this sufferer. The veil of the temple was rent in twain; disembodied spirits walked upon the earth; and there was a mighty darkness. Now, if all this took place, there must have been a large number who felt it, were influenced by it, and proclaimed it. Well, strange to say, astronomical biog-

raphy bears witness to a great eclipse just at the time Jesus died ; and, if I mistake not, several ancient authors speak of this great shadow upon the land.

Next look at the placing of the body in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea, for that could not have been done without an application to the governor, without a written order, and without many witnesses or helpers ; and if the account, therefore, were false, very easily could governmental records have been searched, and the apostles stopped at the very commencement of their preaching. All the Sanhedrin had to do was simply to show to these preachers the burial-place of Jesus, the record of his sepulture by the public authorities, and, if it were necessary, point out his very body in the paupers' or criminals' tomb ; and this they could not do, for his body was carried dead to the Arimathean tomb.

Again, the tomb is found vacant ; and how is this ? In the first place, unusual caution was taken in the sealing of the tomb. Then a stone, a massive stone that could not be moved save by a great many human hands, was placed against the door of it. Then a band of soldiers, armed to the teeth, were set at watch all around it ; and Roman soldiers, too, always so vigilant and so brave, whose sentence was death if they slept, were ordered to stand on guard over this precious place, and yet the tomb was vacant. This the disciples testify, for they say the Lord came to life again ; and this the hostile Jews allow, but say the disciples stole the body while the soldiers slept. Roman soldiers sleep on guard ! Why, that is almost more difficult to

believe than the resurrection itself. One might have slept, and yet that would have been marvellous ; and two might have lost themselves in slumber, and that would have been an event worthy of being trumpeted all over the world. But that all should have slept, that would have been a miracle.

But suppose for a moment that the soldiers did sleep, and that they slept naturally : I do not yet see how that could help the disciples any. For there was a great stone to be removed, the door had to be unsealed ; and what human hands could have done that much in the few hours that the sentinels are said to be asleep ? Then, again, did you ever hear of the solemn execution of that guard for their neglect of duty ? And would not their crucifixion have been an imposing scene, such as would have become indented upon history ? and could anything have saved those poor soldiers from an ignominious and a notorious death ?

Next look at the appearance of Jesus, after his resurrection, to Mary, James, and John ; to the two on the way to Emmaus ; to all at table ; to the doubting Thomas ; to the disciples when fishing ; and, finally, to the five hundred. The testimony to this fact is told in a straightforward way, with a perfect naturalness, so that, however strange it may appear, it carries conviction on the face of it, and when added to the previous facts is perfectly irresistible. Then, too, you have the ascension, the many witnesses, the appearance of the angels, and I would fain add, also, the after appearance of the disciples.

How are we able to account for the great change in

the characters of the disciples, except we admit the resurrection? For we leave them at the time of the crucifixion timid, despondent, and running away, one denying, and all cowards. Now, what power has entered into them, that they are so bold, so willing to suffer, and so ready to die for the Master's sake? Ask them, and they will say that it is the risen Lord who inspires them, but that until he rose their faith was shrouded; and have we not every reason to accept their testimony, or, if we deny it, how can we account for the strange phenomena? Again, my friends, I ask you to look at the effects of Christianity.

The main doctrine of the Christian religion is, as you well know, the fact that we shall live again, and that Jesus stepped visibly from death to indorse this truth. Now for nearly nineteen hundred years has this new doctrine been preached, while all the people of all ages have been sweetened, strengthened, and consecrated by it. But has all this good been based on a falsehood, and can so splendid a reformation be the offspring of a fiction? Why, it is contrary to all the experience of man, to all the laws of human nature, and to all the laws of God. It would be a great deal easier to believe in ten thousand resurrections than to believe that an untruth could be so prolific of good. No, no! The resurrection of Jesus must be true, or else the whole conscience of the world must be readjusted and debased.

There is an objection to the resurrection to which I have but briefly hinted, that perhaps deserves a little deeper notice. I refer to the pseudo-scientific opposi-

tion to the doctrine, on the ground that it is impossible, according to the laws of nature. I speak of the pseudo-scientific mind, because the truly scientific brain never limits the possible and never defines the impossible. I allow that the dissecting knife can never detect the principle of life, nor the keen eye note the passage of the retreating breath; but this, however, proves nothing. The chemist and the anatomist can never analyze voice, and yet there is a voice; they can never describe to you thought, and yet there is thought; and they utterly fail when they attempt the solution of anything mental or spiritual. And if, therefore, when a man is alive, they do not understand him, how can they expect to understand him when he is dying, and when he is seemingly dead? Their testimony is perfectly useless except when yielded in behalf of the body. That is to say, they only know as far as they can see, and in everything else they only utter their poor guesses. Of course, full proof of the resurrection can only come when we ourselves rise, and when we behold, face to face, the ascended Lord; and let us get ready for that great day of blessed emancipation. But all the proof that a man ought to ask is at hand,—evidence as strong as any offered on any other subject, and such as we readily accept on all other points, every day of our lives.

Let us not, then, be faithless like the doubting Thomas, but let us merit the blessing of those “who, not having actually seen, yet believe.” Let us, on this holy Easter, proclaim the risen Lord. A young man preparing at the time for the ministry, filled with the

inspiration of a coming Easter, wrote these words which I asked him to allow me to use:—

“Dark was the night, and weary were the hearts
That wept beside the tomb;
The morning star shone brightly from afar,
But could not pierce the gloom.

“Mocked, beaten, slain, their Lord had been,
By cruel hands had died;
O'er Joseph's tomb they faithful vigil kept,
Where slept the crucified.

“But morning breaks, the earth gives up its dead,
The rock is rolled away.
Sing, sing, O earth! thou sea, roar loud with joy,
And greet the festal day!

“Go tell the news to all the earth around
That Christ, your Lord, has risen;
Tell all the Jews and Gentiles in your land
That earth is joined to heaven.”

V.

THE EVERLASTING DOORS.

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.”—PSALM xxiv. 7.

IT is not my purpose to illustrate and to enforce the strict meaning of the words of the text, nor do I wish to bind its application to the past, nor do I intend to carry you, in imagination, to a Jewish synagogue, in order that you may listen to the glorious chanting of the twenty-fourth psalm, as one part of the choir take a stanza, with rich melody of voice giving utterance to its beauty, while another division of the singers follow on alternately with the other stanzas, until the whole building and all the hearers are charmed into delight, peace, and holiness. Nor do I intend to illustrate the occasion of the first use of the psalm, when the Temple was consecrated, and when the idea of the poet seems to be that the gates of the Temple were too low to admit the entrance of the ark, which was the symbolism of the King of kings. But I would ask all to bring the words down to their own day. I want to make them vital in personal experience; and I desire that we should somehow let them speak out our wants, our cravings, and the greatest dreams of

our best life. Just as the Hebrews chanted the twenty-fourth psalm by responsive choirs, so let there be an answering chant, a beautiful response, and a holy cathedral in each of our bosoms, as we listen to the call of the Lord, and as we make ready for his coming; for then will our whole being be flooded with a joyous light, a sacred sweetness, and a harmony that shall ring its echoes through all the corridors of heaven.

It may be that some may disclaim any personal application of the text, on the ground that they never have had, and never can have, any celestial visitor for whom to prepare; and they may say that their heart is too humble or too weak or too wicked for God ever to think of entering there, and they may suppose that the Infinite Being has too much to do with the general affairs of the heavens and of the earth ever to give His special attention to any single person. What, *our* souls the residence of the Supreme! Heaven bathing *us* with such splendors, the King of glory asking us to receive Him as a guest! Is it not a rash profanity for us so to think, so to dream, so to speak? But, if we have carefully studied the New Testament, we shall find it rather too late for us to question this great truth; for Christ has assured us that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's notice; that all the hairs of our head are numbered; that he and the Father will take up an abode in the devout heart; and that, if we are pure, we shall all be one. Remember Saint Paul's pungent, sublime, holy definition of the Christian, as being the "temple of God." Remember, too, all the revelations, intimations, and prophecies, from Matthew

to the Apocalypse, of the indwelling spirit, and then see to what grandeur our own hearts are capable of reaching, what a royal residence we may possess in our own bosoms, and what a close affiliation, if we only so will it, God has ordained between us and Himself.

If, then, God can come to us, will come to us, does come to us, how shall we make ready for His reception, what quarters shall we give to Him? What royal residence is at His service? and what do we expect and desire that He shall do for us after He has become our Guest? There must be a preparation on our part for the coming of the Divine Being. We must lift up the "gates" of thought and the "everlasting doors" of the affections, and then the "King of glory will come in." We must have a mind and a soul all ready to greet Him, and very grateful for the condescension of His visit.

Lift up the gates of thought. We must think about God; for it is profitable for us to dwell upon His greatness, wisdom, goodness. Let us often think of Him as He stood alone before creation was called into being. Ah! was it not His love that would not let him be alone, but soon induced Him to call the world into existence, and also quickly led Him to give life to all the inhabitants of the earth? Ought we not to consider how good the Creator was to place us in such favorable circumstances, and how kind to surround us with such peculiar advantages? He might have made all about us dark, painful, and repulsive, instead of which He has girdled us with light, both by day and by night, through sun, moon, and stars. He has diversi-

fied the surface of the globe with mountains and valleys. He has garnished our gardens with flowers of exquisite beauty ; and, lest we should be tired of too much land, He has sprinkled the scenery with ocean, sea, bay, pond, rivulet, and brook. Ah ! time would fail us, the voice give out and strength would depart, were we to describe all the beauties, glories, and bounties that God has poured upon this our abiding place, in order that we may be made happy, holy, and grateful. We ought to think of these things ; and never a morning should we open our eyes without a vision of the good God and without adoration of His gracious benignity ; and never a night should we go to sleep without a keen perception of the magnificence around us, and a loving conception of the Power that is always on the watch for our best good. And not only must we think about nature and about God's dealings with us, but we must think about religion itself.

Let us lift up the gates of our thoughts upon the spiritual mysteries that invest our present and future destiny. Ay, let us look upon God's nature and upon God's claims, upon Jesus and his worth, and upon the Holy Spirit, and how much it can offer and will offer and is constantly offering with authority to the seeking and the loving heart. We may ask ourselves thoughtfully, prayerfully, and with perfect propriety, the first great question that underlies, penetrates, and electrifies all other questions,—“Is there a God ?” And it is no mark of insanity, no sign of atheism, no proof of distrust, for any one to ask this great question ; but it is a sign of a desire to be conversant with first principles,

the proof of a wish to start aright, and the mark of a hope to establish a good foundation. Fichte, the great German philosopher and scholar,—to whose opinions we should probably take, in very many respects, quite large exceptions,—has, in one respect, been unjustly blamed and wilfully charged with infidelity for saying to his pupils one day, as they were gathered together for theological study, “Let us to-day make God.” His meaning was very different from what it would at first sight appear. All that he intended to say was, without doubt, simply this: Let us to-day sift the proofs for a God, hunt up the reasons why we need a Supreme Ruler, and thoroughly scan the facts that will inevitably lead us to the great First Cause? Why not? Why should not Fichte and all thinkers and believers and everybody be allowed to search into the very strata of religion,—to dig very deeply into the evidences, with great freedom, with large curiosity, and with a deep unction? I never dread investigation; and in this case I would most cordially, eloquently, earnestly invite it. The foundations are massive: let them be searched. They are immovable: dislodge them, if you are able; for no one with a full balance of mind, heart, and soul, can, after a holy, patient, and thorough search, fail to come to the conclusion that there must be a God. All the more rich, hearty, and genuine will that faith become that is based on study, that has found out for itself its own needs, that has discovered the Helper, and that has not been afraid to lift up its reason in such an exalted work as finding God.

After we have obtained our Maker, we are next to

get an idea of His character, nature, and attributes. I have a right to use my mind, and I am called upon to use it in thinking out what God ought to be. Do not call it the pride of human reason, do not call it human folly, do not call it a fruitless experiment, but look upon it as one of the grandest spectacles that angels witness when the child tries to understand the Father, and when the finite grasps after the Infinite. We may make mistakes in our search, and we shall make mistakes; but the Bible will gradually correct them, intuition will in time reveal them, and eternity will set all things aright. I take the same ground in regard to Christ and the Holy Spirit. My own views concerning these two powers in the Church almost border upon old church doctrine; while the more I study the Bible, the deeper and the richer views do I get of their grandeur, power, and holiness. Yet here I would say to every one, Exercise the largest field of thought reverently, tremblingly, but freely. I do not dread — no, I invite — the closest examination of the nature of God and Christ; for I am convinced that the farther we look into these spiritual realities, the more closely we lift upon them our purified reason, the more tender will become their claims, the more sacred their honors, the more august their authority, and the more sublime their influence. Of course there are mysteries about religion which the most able minds can never sift; there are mighty truths encircling it which only a Deity can solve; and there are splendors arching it that the eyes of angels can but half appreciate. But yet a great part of religious truth is subjected to our inspection,

craves our closest scrutiny, and ever grows more and more potent in its claims ; and the more and more sublime in its attractions, the more we accept the challenge, and walk fearlessly into its inner chambers, sounding, so far as we are able, its wonderful, gracious, and startling depths. Many persons are willing to think about everything else except religion ; but here a magic wand seems to paralyze their brain, while an awful stupor benumbs all their thinking. They are bright enough in their business affairs, and they show there commanding minds. They are sparkling enough in their homes, for they deem it proper there to exercise a full imagination, a ripe judgment, and a positive authority ; but the moment they step into the cathedral or within the range of cathedral requisitions, then they become marble : they are different persons, they wait for somebody else to move them, and they stand just where they are placed.

We have several reasons offered to us for this personal lethargy. It is said that religion is too sacred to be defined, and that it must simply be received ; and it is averred that a business man has no time to attend to spiritual matters, and that it is his duty to leave such concerns to his minister, and that he must take Scriptural truth at second hand from his spiritual teacher. It is maintained, too, that we can never get full satisfaction on Divine concerns, and that it is hardly worth while to begin a study that can never be completed.

To such, let us reply that the mind never was given to us that we might wrap it in a napkin, and that it is a poor compliment to the Framer and the Donor of so

rich a gift for us to deny its freedom as soon as it is received. If religion and religious appeals be too sacred to be understood, why, then, evidently we have no concern with them whatsoever, and they must be meant for an order of beings very different from man ; and, if the minister is to do our praying and our thinking, why, he can with just as much propriety do our eating and our sleeping.

Again, we never get full satisfaction in anything that we undertake ; and shall we, therefore, refuse to do anything, and are we to sit still and to play the drone, because, forsooth, we cannot grasp all the meaning of every event that greets us ? You yourself are a mystery ; and shall you therefore deny all acquaintance with yourself ? Your friends around you are enveloped in clouds : shall you on this account give up your friends ? Life itself is intersected with webs, entanglements, and labyrinths ; and shall we all of us, then, at once put ourselves out of existence ? Let us carry the same common sense into our religion that we carry every day into our business life, and then we shall be safe. There is no reason that can be found upon the earth or in heaven why we should not “lift up” the gates of our mind for the incoming of all God’s spiritual truths.

But I come now to something better, and to something of which I love to speak, in private and in public, and everywhere and at all times. We must lift up the everlasting doors of our hearts, that the King of glory may come in. God craves most of all, first of all, and as comprehending all, a lodgement in our hearts. It

is not enough that we strive to compass Him with our thoughts; but we must also engirdle Him by our emotions, surround Him by our intuitions, and endear ourselves to Him by our affections. We may have a very clear conception of God, may really know a great deal about Him, and yet we may be very weak spiritually; for our greatest theologians are not of necessity our best Christians, and, in fact, some of our mightiest believers are found among the unlettered and the unfortunate. Some persons who have no power of consecutive thought, who have never had their reason trained, and who by the force of circumstances have been kept low in life, being compelled to devote all their spare hours to hard labor, can yet, notwithstanding these mental disadvantages, feel deeply, richly, and gloriously God's love, and can love God, too, with all their heart, soul, and strength. We must give our hearts to God; and this must be a free-will offering, as free as the song of a bird, with sweet, entrancing, and uplifting melody, suffusing not only the countenance but the life with glory, and throwing a sacred lustre upon every thought that we cherish, burnishing with celestial brightness every word that we speak, cleansing, consecrating, and uplifting every deed that we perform. Yes, our hearts must lean on God's great heart, resting there gently, confidently, peacefully, and gloriously; and then on the countenance there will be no tear, and on the soul there will fall no dread. "It is said that a silver egg was once given to a Saxon queen. When she opened the silver by a secret spring, there was found a yolk of gold; and when

she touched a spring in the yolk, there was discovered a beautiful bird; and when she pressed the wings of the bird, on its breast was revealed a crown, jewelled and radiant. And even within the crown, upheld by a spring like the rest, was a ring of diamonds, which fitted the finger of the princess herself." So, if we are true Christians, we shall have given to us faith, and within our faith will be found devotion, and in the centre of devotion, the spiritual birds of the soul, singing unto God, and encircling the wings of these messengers of peace and light, there will be the crown of righteousness, and at last will be found, inside of the crown, the spiritual ring of diamond brightness, that will complete our adornment for heaven. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." We certainly cannot complain of the guest who desires to share our hospitality. We cannot question the motives that lead to his visit. We know that He comes with royal gifts for our blessed acceptance. We are aware that we shall be very much better off for His company, and we must be sure that in His presence we shall be greater, stronger, and holier every way.

We know all these things, we have not the shadow of a doubt about them. Why, then, do we delay? Why do we not let the King of glory enter into the soul?

O King of glory, come into the sacred cathedral of the soul, open the gates, throw back the doors, and take full possession of all our inward life. Let us be jubilant in Thy presence, kindle up our minds to dia-

mond brightness, fill our hearts with a sure devotion, and flood our whole lives with a perfect glory.

Christian friends, one has said, and let us each in our souls repeat his touching words : —

“ Lord, I hear of showers of blessing
Thou art scattering full and free,—
Showers the thirsty land refreshing :
Let some droppings fall on me.

“ Pass me not, O tender Saviour,
Let me love and cling to thee ;
I am longing for thy favor,—
While thou’rt calling, oh, call me.

“ Pass me not ! Thy lost one bringing,
Bind my heart, O Lord, to thee ;
While the streams of life are springing,
Blessing others, oh, bless me — *even me.*”

VI.

RESTLESS DESIRE.

“Be still.”—PSALM xlv. 10.

OCCASIONALLY in our lives, and with some of us a great many times, I think we feel like arising from where we stand, and like going forward to what we think will be a better place; and we are not still, thoughtful, and uncomplaining. That is, a restless desire is a part of the make-up of average human nature, and attends us, more or less, during all our earthly pilgrimage; for we all of us wish for a change in our place of living, or in our occupation, or in our friends, or in our health, or in our education, or in our religion, or in the current of circumstances that besets us. And we think that, if we only could have been something different from what we are, then we should have attained just what we now desire; that is, if we could have the privilege of marching to the place, or the occupation, or the advantages created by our imagination, we would fly right into the possession of a solid, splendid, and permanent success. But our wings are clipped, or else they were never given to us, or else we do not know how to use them; and so we are obliged to stay just where we are.

Let us look at this matter a little closely. Our place of living distresses us; and we think that, if we could have been born almost anywhere else, our chances would have been better. But this climate, or this age, or this restricted position that greeted us when we first opened our eyes, and all these preordained realities, have worked against us ever since our birth, so that we have been in the treadmill always, and shall probably continue so till we die. My friends, those are very faint at the heart who think so, or talk so, or allow anybody else to say so; and I am out of all patience with such wicked excuses, that are offered as the apology for milk-and-water lives, for we all know that solid success is made, not inherited. Hardship is its mother, Toil is its father, and Rough Usage is its best friend. I admit that the massive English writer has said, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them"; yet he would admit that true, solid, and lasting greatness must be earned, and not taken as a gift. The cottage and the hut have more frequently produced the best men, the noblest women, and the most stalwart children than the palace with all its magnificence; and pinched poverty has been the early benediction of many a person whose name now rings around the world in tones of glory that shall never die out. Yet we sigh, because we wish to begin life over again, under new conditions; but let us be assured that, if we had ten thousand chances for making a fresh start, and all according to our own plan, as we at the time thought best, we should probably fail every time, unless we found out before the experiment

was over that the victory rested more in our own will, consecrated by Almighty God, than in any outward conditions whatsoever.

Again, some say that they have chosen the wrong occupation, and that, if they could only go away to the true place, their course would be altogether more brilliant, pleasing, and profitable. I am hardly prepared to deny the assertion altogether, and in very many cases the statement may be thoroughly true; while, for no fault of our own, we may be placed just where we are, with but little hope of relief. And yet I am very apt to think that the majority of those who are not contented where they are will hardly accomplish much anywhere else, because rooted habits are hard to be dislodged, and people never know where to find the man who is to-day here and to-morrow elsewhere; and the hands that are trained in one way, unless they are pre-eminently skilful, will not work easily in other lines of labor, and a discouraged heart, even in pleasant fields, will have parted with its vigor, inspiration, and glory. So that

“Act well your part, there all the honor lies,”

seems to apply to the spot just where we are, to the work just at hand, and to the duties that God has given to us.

How often one says, “If I had only been this or that!” But let us show what we can do where we are, and not boast of what we are able to do where we are not, and where most likely we never shall be; for we can never do our best anywhere unless we have courage, hope, and indomitable will, and a right royal heart.

What we might have done somewhere else is not the question before this grand amphitheatre of life, but what we are doing now, and with what conscience, love, resignation, and hope. Let us not attempt to go away from the present place of duty, unless God, beyond the quiver of a doubt, sends the command that will carry us just where we want to go, and we are sure that the order is from above, and not the wretched suggestion of an inflated self-appreciation; and let us make the best of our circumstances and become superior to all obstacles with a real brave, sunny, and triumphant heart.

Some of us complain that, if we had more friends or different kinds of friends, we should succeed better in life; and we want to go away to some spot where such helpers can be found in a large, gracious, and beautiful abundance. But our best friend is our own right arm, that is consecrated, of course, by the grace of God; and the best plan for us, too, is to make our own way, and then we shall have all the friends that we want, and our very independence will give us comfort, peace, and joy.

As a general rule in life, the true men and the noble women become so by opposition, so that enemies have oftentimes unconsciously furnished the rounds in the ladder by which many have risen to honor, peace, and glory, and thus have thorns been changed to crowns. The oak would never be half the tree it is, save for the adverse winds, terrible storms, and daily opposition that make its roots deeper on the side where their unfriendly visits are most frequently made. Several

writers have spoken of the value of having enemies. Allow me to quote a few of them, for I think we often get considerably strengthened by making a mosaic of other people's thoughts. Cato exclaims, "Some men are more beholden to their bitterest enemies than to friends who appear to be sweetness itself." So Addison tells us that "Plutarch has written an essay on the benefits which a man may receive from his enemies, and among the good fruits of enmity mentions this in particular: that, by the reproaches which it casts upon us, we see the worst side of ourselves." And the Abbé de Rannci says, "Did a person but know the value of an enemy, he would purchase him with pure gold." John Neal quite eloquently writes: "A certain amount of opposition is a great help to a man. Kites rise against and not with the wind. Even a head wind is better than none. No man ever worked his passage anywhere in a dead calm." Burke: "Our antagonist is our helper." And Molière tells us, "The more powerful the obstacle, the more glory we have in overcoming it; and the difficulties with which we are met are the maids of honor which set off virtue." Yes, it is a universal experience that the best heroes and the noblest heroines are made, not by being pushed ahead, but by being pushed back; not on the bed of roses, but on the bed of thorns; not when wreathed by sunbeams, but when enveloped by clouds; and he or she who sighs for more propitious circumstances will find that nobody reaps a harvest of glory in this world or in the next world by a wrench or jump or leap, but only from hard labor, heavy pangs, terrible agony, and

great tribulation. So, too, some say that they could do better if they had stronger health; and this is the saddest plea that is ever given for lack of work, growth, and real, solid, and quickening joy. Yet even here I think I have a ground of complaint that the excuse is insufficient, that manifest duties are overlooked, and that noble encouragements are ignored; for every one can do all that is required, and to those unto whom but little is given not much is demanded, and all are always victorious who do what they can, and do it in the best way possible, and do it with a hearty good will. Does any one tell me that life is a failure because such a one is feeble, sick, and in constant pain? I say, No, unless the will is weak, the heart is palsied, and faith is crippled. Let us do what we can, and that is all that we are asked to do; and God never meant that we should measure our responsibility by duties beyond our reach, for He asks of all of us only what is possible, what we can easily do, what we ought to do.

We certainly can be patient, devout, loving, pure, and holy; and thus we shall set a good example that will be a contagion in the neighborhood, fill the world with saints, and wreath the faces of all the angels with the holiest of smiles. I visited once a little girl, doomed to occupy her bed for life, tortured all the time, and yet so sweet, gentle, happy, and so perfectly radiant in faith, courage, good nature, purity, and devotion that it seemed as if an angel had just come down from God's city, and had taken such dilapidated garments, that we poor mortals might be taught how to make agony sublime, disease a benediction, and approaching death an apocalypse of glory, beauty, and honor.

And so, too, have we not all seen sick-chambers, where pain, anguish, weariness, and certain death only made the sufferer more grand and beautiful, holy and sublime? Again, some throw the blame of what they call their troubles upon their education. They think, if they had only been trained differently, they could have accomplished a great deal more; and they would fain now march away to a larger development, better teachers, and deeper mental power. Well, of course, education has a great deal to do with growth, success, and happiness; and a false education will prove a hindrance to each and to all of us all through our lives, making progress an up-hill work continually. But, friends, the true triumph is when we make the best of what knowledge we possess, and do not groan forever over lost opportunities. As the old couplet has it,—

“What you can help, cure;
What you cannot help, endure.”

Let us leap the chasm, if we can, but not stop, grumble, and moan at the brink; and, if the jump is not in us, we are not to blame for staying where we are. But, if it be in us, the good, earnest, loving, and mighty spring is better than ten thousand apologies or a million regrets or a torrent of tears. The very time that we occupy with our complaints could far better be filled with labor well performed, duty honorably met, and sufferings bravely borne. Let us do as Longfellow says:—

“Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.”

So, too, we complain of our religion, or of the current of circumstances that besets us, or of anything and everything that we suppose has been, or is, or will be in our way; and we want to go somewhere where we can get out of difficulty, grow more rapidly, and have peace, honor, and satisfaction.

But, my friends, those who are not satisfied where they are, cannot do their duty just there, grow there, and carry a happy face there, will be miserable anywhere and everywhere else; and every change in position, or in circumstances, or in desire, will only add to the burden that they daily carry in the heart. We are all of us altogether too restless. Striving as we do continually for something else, we lose the beauty, advantage, and the glory of what we have; and thus often in a garden of roses we see no grandeur, perceive no fragrance, and simply complain of the thorns. Others are envying us our advantages all the time, while we at the same moment are totally unconscious of the vast beneficence that surrounds, engirdles, hallows, and glorifies our steps.

Of course, all growth depends upon our reaching forward, our hoping for more, our grasping better things; but cannot we sometimes stand still, be still, keep still, enjoy what we have, and thank God, from the depths of our hearts, for his unceasing bounties? The Psalmist once said, you remember, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." I suppose the writer meant fly away to the grave or fly up to heaven, and throw aside the burden of this life altogether; and we all of us feel just like

that sometimes. But, supposing the wings were given to us, should we dare to fly, and should we be sure that, if we went away from an unaccomplished duty, we should find a perfect rest as a reward for our cowardice, laziness, and despair?

We are to stand at our post of duty, we are to be still, and we are to keep still, my friends, till relieved; and he or she who runs away from duty must be branded as a traitor at once. Fly away? No! Let us stay where we are. No matter how hard the job, nor how painful the discipline, nor how discouraging the outlook, let us stay just where we are till the honorable discharge from service is issued by Almighty God. So did he, the Master of us all, whose life was so blessed, whose presence is such a benediction, and whose welcome, I hope, at last we shall each and all receive.

Glory be to His holy name! If we had the wings of a dove, we say with the Psalmist, we would fly away, and be at rest. But is an eternal rest the great coronation of all success, here and hereafter? and do we want to reach any place, or stand anywhere, or be ordered anywhere, where the reward of doing nothing shall be placed in our hands? If so, we are longing for a curse, and we are reaching out after destruction; for the moment that we make rest eternal we write death upon the soul, and then will all growth be ended, all desire be clipped, and all duty ignored. Shall we stand still, fold our hands, go to sleep, and dream forever? O God, save us from such a fearful doom as that. A temporary rest is well: slight pauses now and then afford refreshment and cheer; but he or she who ex-

pects to rest on the oars forever might as well be changed to a rock at once. "Be still." This is not standing still forever, resting on our oars complacently, lifting not a hand to work nor an eye to duty ; but the order means, Stop complaining, stop doubting, keep still from false charges against Almighty God, and do the best you can with the opportunities at hand.

God gives to us all, and all the time, the wings of a dove ; that is, He gives to us the wings of motion, and He expects us to use our wings with a sober discretion, with a patient gratitude, with a freedom from all complaints whatsoever. If God gives us the wings of a dove, my friends, we will fly nearly all the time, quietly, in stillness, cleaving the air gently, and pausing only on the branches of reflection or in the groves of prayer, or by the purling brooks of a deep, holy, and blessed consecration, that we may quench a transient thirst ; but our course shall be onward and upward, our plumage white and beautiful, our motion easy and swift, and all things about us full of innocence, purity, humility, and peace. "Be still." Well, on this Whit-Sunday, white with the blossoms, white of old by the garments of those who presented themselves for baptism, and white (or, in other words, clear, bright, beautiful, and holy) because on this day the "Holy Ghost" descended with mighty power,—on this Whit-Sunday, so glorious in its history, so precious in its memories, so cheering in its promises, so holy in its benediction, let us be still, and hear the tongues so various, receive the glories so great, and gain our real anointing for all life's work, all life's discipline, and all life's issues. So may it be, Almighty God !

VII.

THE GIFTS OF THE PAST.

“Other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.” —
ST. JOHN iv. 38.

IT is sometimes a great disappointment to us, a startling mystery, one of the unaccountable dealings of God with this world, that so many persons labor, and labor earnestly, affectionately, and faithfully, but fail to get the reward that they deserve. Another set of men or women enter into their labors; that is, take the results, get the reward, carry off the honors, enjoy comforts never earned, and receive all the blessings without any of the hard work, so that one set of people are sowing all the time, and quite another set are perhaps thanklessly enjoying the harvest, which truth brings up the whole question of our perpetual obligations, and enforces the conviction that we are living on borrowed capital all the time. Of course, first, we owe everything that we have to the grace of God, that never fails; and, secondly, we have a whole past behind us, to which we are greatly indebted. And to all the people who, under God, have built up our institutions, we should give our perpetual thanksgivings.

First, let us thank God for existence, food, opportunities, and His constantly giving hand.

I am aware that very many people, at times, doubt whether they ought to thank God for birth. "To be or not to be, that is the question"; and, considering the exposures, hostilities, temptations, dangers, difficulties, and all the mystery, pain, and brevity of life, would it not have been better that we never had been sent here? This is a very serious question with some people,—nay, with all of us, at certain crises in our experience, when we do not know which way to go, and when we do know that, whatever way we go, agony will be the result. Then we doubt, after all, whether life is worth living.

Yet I cannot help feeling that we must thank God that He created us. Of course, a great many persons come into the world paupers, and go out of the world in the same condition; and between the coming and the going the experience is hard, the discipline sharp, the tears many, the pain great. Yet even then I cannot help thinking that life is a boon,—a boon disguised, it may be, a mercy veiled, a gift under a cloud, yet an opportunity that some day will be proved a benediction; for not all that seemingly have lost the prizes have really lost the crown, and sometimes the very price for the crown has been the suffering that led to it. Many of our great writers seem to convey this idea. Listen to their beautiful words.

Binney says, "The shattered spirit can only reflect external beauty"; Richter, "Our sorrows are like thunder-clouds, which seem black in the distance, but grow lighter as they approach"; the English poet, "Sorrow is knowledge"; and Tupper, "There is joy in

sorrow, which none but a mourner can know"; and Cowper,—

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

And Jesus tells us, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." But how many reasons the prosperous have; for which they should thank God,—for life here upon the earth, the God that bestows health, food, opportunities, and everything! And yet how often the *most favored* are the least thankful! How filled they very frequently are with pride, self-assertion, selfishness, cruelty, and all things bad, so that, when we see a really prosperous man, who is all the time deeply grateful, nobly generous, and truly religious, who looks upon his opportunities as a trust, and upon his good fortune as something in which he wishes all men to have a share,—when such a wonderful specimen of humanity is witnessed, how all are cheered, comforted, strengthened, and what a refreshment comes upon the earth, so that even those least like the pattern cannot help being glad to see a type of human nature so vastly different from the general copy! And, although such may cry out that such a person is odd, an enthusiast, and wild, yet way down in their hearts they have a jubilee for the glorious manifestation; and perhaps involuntarily they are saying, O God, at some future day, make us like that good man.

Again, my friends, for all that we enjoy, after thanking God, we must thank the great past behind us; or rather the thousands of individuals who compose that

past, and into whose labors we have entered. And here the scholars, the philosophers, the builders, rise up; and we must call them blessed, not because they did everything, but because they did so much, and because they have sent their precious legacies down to this hour for our special benefit, our holy uplifting, and our constant peace. Where should we be but for these labors of the past? "We cannot," said Emerson, "overestimate our debt to the past." And Tennyson speaks of "the eternal landscape of the past." And Adelaide Procter,—

"Oh, there are voices of the past,
Links of a broken chain,
Wings that can bear me back to times
Which cannot come again;
Yet God forbid that I should lose
The echoes that remain."

And Henry Ward Beecher, in one of his peculiar strains of eloquence, cries out: "There have been many men who left behind them that which hundreds of years have not worn out. The earth has Socrates and Plato to this day. The world is richer yet by Moses and the old prophets than by the wisest statesmen. We are indebted to the past. We stand in the greatness of ages that are gone rather than in that of our own."

Yes, my friends, we have entered into the labors of other people. We are gathering up the harvest that comes from seeds that are sown by other hands. We are taking rewards for that which we have not earned.

The honors are ours, but the suffering fell upon other hearts. We see it in literature, buildings, religion, and everything.

What easy lessons to-day for boys and girls, because strong men and women ages ago lost their eyesight and their health, and perhaps their life, in finding out truths that are the A, B, C's of the present hour, so that a child of twelve to-day, with his present knowledge, if carried back five hundred years, would be one of the sages of the past; but that very present knowledge which the child would carry back would be the legacy of the greatest minds and hardest workers of many centuries, so that that child has taken the apple from the tree that sprang up from the seeds that his ancestors planted!

Then look at the buildings to-day all over the world, all the builders of which have passed on to God, where the names of many of the workmen are forgotten, and see how the glory remains, while the givers of the bounty on the mortal side have perished. We enter St. Peter's at Rome, or Westminster Abbey, or the Cathedral at Cologne, or the mosque of St. Sophia at Constantinople, and not a soul can tell us, perhaps, who laid the first corner-stone or who dug the foundation, or the first man that conceived the thought of the grand structures; but we enjoy the beauty, nevertheless, admire the splendor, wonder at the genius, and gather the fruits, without caring, it may be, who were the original benefactors that have by anticipation lavished upon us so profusely these great privileges. That is, we enter into the labors of those who have

toiled for our sakes, without paying any price to them, *the real owners*, for the great bounty.

So, too, we are oftentimes heedless as to the progressive history of religious thought. Dr. Clarke has written about the ten great religions to which we are indebted for a great deal of our spiritual growth; and I verily believe that it was the one great religion of our Lord and master, so firmly seated in Dr. Clarke's heart, that opened his eyes to, and stirred his soul toward, and glorified his lips to speak about, and forced his hands to take his pen and write about the pearls and the diamonds scattered all the way along from the days of creation in a religious line, that were finally consecrated by the baptism of the great Teacher of us all, who tells his disciples in all their studies and lessons to gather up treasures both new and old, and who, even in the Lord's prayer that he gave to us, put together with a divine wisdom rich sayings that by the grace of God had leaped from souls that were, for the time at least, in strict alliance with holiness.

"Other men labored, and ye have entered into their labors." I have sometimes thought what would those other men who have labored so hard, toiled night and day, giving their strength, ambition, and enthusiasm to the carrying out of a grand idea, have thought or said or dreamed, could they have known that strangers would enjoy the fruit of their efforts, and that they were securing victory for somebody else, heaping up treasures and knowing not who would gather them.

In Boston, about thirty-two years ago, a man built a house, built it by the day, superintended the job

himself, spared neither time nor money that he might, in the end, secure for himself for life a comfortable dwelling; and, about the same time, a young man was settled in a neighboring city, and took for his dwelling a cottage house, humbly built of wood, and sufficient for the shelter of himself and the one to whom he had given his name. And neither of the two men to whom I refer were acquainted with each other. And yet that first man, with all his plans for a life estate, and with his lavish expenditure for trifles, was really building a home for the younger man, who in after years entered into the labors of the careful but prodigal builder, and became the owner of that which was built, not as it seems for a life estate, but for an unknown successor; and thus lives touched that no one would have dreamed had any possible point of contact.

So it is always, everywhere, in all time: we are all the time entering into, enjoying, and becoming benefited in every possible way by the labors of others; and we are all the time working for unknown parties, who will enter into our labors and so on forever. And it is well, however we may feel about it. At first thought, of course, the builders are disappointed. Why not, they may say, let us have the only enjoyment of that which we create? and, when we can enjoy the gift no more, let it perish, and do not let another hand take that which is ours. But, on deeper thought, they and we and all will see that such a selfish outlook would destroy the world. It is only a world because one generation builds for another generation; and every

generation is telegraphing all the time to the future. I think that there is a real glory, a true joy, and a holy inspiration about labor, because it must be from the very nature of the case, by the ordinance of Almighty God, really unselfish. The maker of bricks, perhaps, at the time, only thinks of the gain that the sale of them will bring to his credit, not of the buildings that they will make and of the thousands of people they will shelter and of the years those bricks will be seen by the eyes of men, long after the hand that created them has vanished from sight.

So look at any great building, and how many people you have to thank for its beauty!—the architect who planned it, the mason, the carpenter, the painter, the day laborer, the plumber, the glazier, the locksmith, and the man who earned the money by which he was enabled to put all these varied laborers into activity; and all these people that I have mentioned are perpetually sending telegrams and gifts into an unknown future that their mortal eyes will never behold. Call up all those who had a hand in the building of the Pyramids in Egypt, and Boston Common would not hold the thousands and tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands who would rise up and claim an ownership in the great work, by gifts or by labor or by some kind of authority delegated for the purpose.

This is the law of Christ's life, that he lived for us and for all. Nineteen centuries look back to Bethlehem and Nazareth and Jerusalem, and bow reverently in gratitude for the gracious help that has always reached the heart of man from one who made those

places sacred, and who, by his passing away to God, has made all parts of the earth full of a possible glory.

It is the law, too, of all lives, that they are lived for others ; and every life is a receiving from the past and a donation to the future. Every church in the land is a mausoleum of the past, erected into glory by the faithful prayers, the earnest labors, the holy lives, the benignant pastorship of those faithful and loving disciples of Jesus who have stood in the pulpit, and have declared the will of God unto those who have gathered for worship during many years in the past ; but it is also a perpetual fountain of power to coming generations, and to all who shall stand from time to time in the sacred place as ambassadors from heaven, so that, as they enter into the labors of those who have gone before, the very quickening spirit of the past shall make the future even more blessed, comforting, and grand.

This Sabbath-day, too, that we each week consecrate, is a legacy from the past ; and the labors of other men have brought about the sacredness of Sabbath worship, and rendered it beautiful, inspiring, and fragrant, so that, as we meet once in seven days to thank God for His manifold blessings, let us not forget to thank Him for the Pilgrims and the Puritans and all their successors in the Church, who, believing in God and Christ and religion and literature and all things good, reared the Church, started the school, and raised up benevolent institutions, that all the people might bow before the Infinite One in reverence, love, and holy

gratitude, so that we to-day enter into their labors through the advance that they have caused in civilization and holiness. Yes, let us thank God for the past as well as for the present ; and let us humbly beseech Him to make the future a glorious apocalypse, of which neither God, nor Christ, nor angels, nor man need ever be ashamed.

VIII.

EVERYTHING UNCERTAIN.

“Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”—PROV. xxvii. 1.

TIME is never truly valued until it verges upon eternity. We seem to have plenty of it until it is about to be taken away; and we recklessly squander what we would, at the hour of death, give worlds to regain. Nay, we sometimes speak of to-morrow with a confidence, boastfulness, and authority, as if it were already in our grasp, and as if our mere summons could create its birth; and this is very strange, when every day we witness the foolishness of such a settled trust. Ah! we know that we have not the command of even a minute in advance. We know that the next second all that is ours, save the soul, may be dashed to atoms. We see all around us hints of a coming eclipse; and yet we go on dreaming, calculating, prophesying, and promising as if we, above all others, had such a mortgage upon the future that it could not by any possibility slip out of our hands.

Let us wake up from this sad sense of security, put our house in order that no surprise can cause our defeat, and be armed, fortified, and prepared against

any sudden danger by having our souls ready for anything and for everything as God shall ordain.

The old Puritan believers — stanch, good men they were — had a charming way of testifying to their sense of the instability of all things, since they always had a solemn prefix to all their pledges, and they used to say, “God willing,” we will do this or that, and then they gladly, contentedly, and hopefully left issues to providential appointment, keeping engagements, if able, or as readily breaking them, if a divine will interposed ; and hence they continually presented a calm manner amid all the changes of their earthly discipline. I wish that more of this illuminating faith had descended to their posterity ; for, surely, no better legacy could they have given to a wavering world than this simple and yet grand example of a sturdy reliance upon God’s blessed will.

We all of us trust too much to to-morrow, and we think too little of to-day ; that is, we treat lightly what is ours, while we strive to grasp that which is not ours. How dare we presume upon any time but the present hour, or upon any opportunity but that now offered ? And is there not enough before us, if rightly used, to make us good, great, and glorious ? And will not idle dreaming, guessing, and forecasting make us cowards, slaves, and drones ? All our heroes and our heroines have become distinguished by taking hold of what was directly before them, and by making the best of that ; and thus, gradually, but surely, have they ascended to glory, power, and immortality. Why not ? For the present is evidently all that we can well manage, full

enough to tax our utmost powers, and is forced upon our immediate notice. Let us build up ourselves, just as we build up our houses,—first the foundation, then the corner-stone, then story by story; and, no matter if the building never be finished, let it be well done as far as it goes. We have no responsibility about the completion, but we are responsible for every step that is taken toward the final coronation. We must answer for the digging, let it be deep, sure, strong; for the stones, let them be solid; for the timber, let it be sound; for the mortar, let it be well made; and for the whole work, as far as it goes, let it be in proportion, ornamental, useful, and worthy of respect. We must do the opening work to-day, although to-morrow our frame should turn to marble, while other hands take up what we have left undone.

Again, I maintain that life becomes more easy as we count it by the days and hours, and not by the months and years; and the cares of life are not so heavy when we take them one by one and manage them as they are sent. For duty thus met seems not half so heavy, pains thus greeted are not half so severe, and tears thus received are not half so scalding.

The management of life is something like the ascent of Mount Washington. If, when we start to climb, we keep thinking of the great distance that must be conquered ere we reach the summit, we shall very soon get weary, dispirited, and sad; but, if, wisely, we think nothing about the distance, but take each step as if it were the last step, and all the time beautifully consecrate our eyesight and insight, fatigue will take its

flight, and nimbly, enthusiastically, and joyously we shall mount upward. Well, just so in our life; for there we must not care too much about the end, but we must care about the now, and the now must be inspired, glorified, made holy, pure, sweet, and sacred forever and ever. We must improve ourselves by the air, scenery, and travelling now; and then, when the summit is reached, all will be bright, peaceful, and grand. Let us care not where the roseate beams of to-morrow's dawning sun may find us, but let us be resolved every day that we live, in storm or sunshine, that we will be full of spiritual fidelity and overflowing with gracious, gentle, and holy thoughts. The visit of our dear Master to this world was mainly for the purpose of proving to us how everything here is transitory, unstable, fleeting, and fading away; and yet, in taking away our material support, he did not leave us trembling in agony and floating on nothing. Oh, no! for he pointed to the unchanging God, taught us about himself as the Rock of Ages, lifted his eyes toward heaven as the sure and immovable home, referred to the undying soul, celestial joys, and unending glories that no earthquake could overthrow, no time destroy, and no wickedness undermine; and he virtually said, Nothing is sure here, but everything is sure hereafter. All things are chaotic in the flesh; but all things are orderly, beautiful, sublime, and permanent in the spirit form. There are no to-morrows upon the earth, but there is an eternal to-morrow in heaven. He constantly told us "not to lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust would corrupt, but in

heaven, where neither moth nor rust could corrupt nor thieves break through and steal." He always represented life as a trust, a discipline, and an achievement, but also as something transient and as something that must be changed or merged or promoted into a state of being higher, holier, stronger, more brilliant, and really everlasting. He never for a moment flattered our longing for the perpetuity of time; but he frankly told us that the Master would come for us in an hour when we should the least expect the visit. "*Watch!*" was his great trumpet word. "Put on the wedding garment" was his main and earnest entreaty, and "Come unto me" his grand and perpetual appeal. The apostles also, catching the spirit and the tone of their Master's message, continually published their keen sense of the insecurity of time, and clearly made known their vital comprehension of the instability of material things; for they expected any moment and every moment to be called. The end they conceived as very near. Every year of life was to them a surprise; and they wanted everything done at once, for the time was short and eternity close at hand. Brave men they were, and they worked nobly and well under the canopy of this grand idea; and if we ever wonder at the amount of their doings, are amazed at their blazing zeal, and if they seem to us more than men, as with a holy velocity they anoint time with their finished work, just here we find the true explanation. They thought that they were tenants at will, and they expected very soon to be ordered to vacate the chambers of the flesh. What if they were mis-

taken in regard to the time when the great end would come! They certainly were not mistaken, but were wonderfully wise in being ever ready for a change; for the good soldier is always prepared to march.

"Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." How many strange things may happen in a day! In fact, the nucleus of almost all great events is formed between the rising and the setting sun. A simple message from the mouth, the mere signing of a paper, a transient frown,—ay, as the legend has it, the mere spilling of a cup of tea,—and then nations have been shaken to their centre, and principles have been inaugurated or exploded that have blessed or cursed the race. All great transactions hang upon the pivot of a moment, when something done or something left undone has given a peculiar shape or a marked tinge to the ages as they have rolled rapidly away. Is it not enough for us, then, to look at this grand epoch of to-day? and ought we not to throw our whole energy upon that which is so full of opportunity, so rich with power, so filled with beauty? And can we have any desire to leap over these sublime boundaries? Why should we not take the lever that is thus placed in our hands, and uplift the world? Come, brother, come, sister, think now a grand thought, speak now a quickening word, do now a splendid deed; and then, come what will, nobody can wipe that glorious record out, for it will stand to your credit, it will cling to your biography, it will perfume your life, and you will hear about it some day at the court of heaven. Oh, do not say to-morrow, or by and by, or there is time enough!

What if all our heroes and our heroines had said just those things? If so, I hardly think that any of us would now be basking in the light of the civilization, progress, and Christianity of the nineteenth century.

A great many people have said, "To-morrow"; but, when to-morrow came, they were wiped from the face of the earth. The true secret of great success rests in the fact that one should rightly understand how to manage the present. "Strike while the iron is hot," said the old proverb; and, if we let delay throw its chilling coolness upon any of our enterprises, we shall surely be defeated. Undue haste, of course, must be avoided. A commendable patience is ever to be praised; but a coward's sluggishness we must always cry down, dismiss, and put out.

My friends, let us not be afraid, let us not be stoical, and let us not give up in despair when we become aware how uncertain everything is; for such a state of mind will not help the matter in the least, and, thus feeling, we shall lose all our power, and become empty of all grace, enthusiasm, and holiness.

I dislike to see a human being go whimpering through life, and quite as repulsive also is the one who looks as if he were made of marble; and there is a better way of getting out of the difficulty or of greeting it than by timidity or by stoical indifference. It is the way of submission, trust, earnest piety, and devout consecration. If we look upon our days as we should, if we anoint time as we ought, if we estimate existence in its right light, and bring it within the focus of its divine affiliations, why, nothing can throw us out of our calm-

ness, nothing can make us grow pale, and nothing can force us into despair; for we shall have outgeneraled all the armies of the opposing fiend, and we shall have forced our enemies to a certain defeat.

Let you and I, or anybody, be beset by trouble, why, then, if we hold tightly the hand of Almighty God, if we only lean serenely on the dear Redeemer, if we are thickly canopied, beautifully overshadowed, sweetly enveloped, and sacredly penetrated by the Holy Spirit, nothing can put us down, nothing can put us out, nothing can upset us. Of course, every one's life is filled with thorns, covered with thistles, overclouded with cares; and yet these are by no means meant to destroy us and to completely conquer our vitality. No, not that. In our weakness we think so, in our cowardice we may say so, and in our fretfulness we make believe so; but we know better, and our inward monitor tells us that we are not thus tried that we may be overthrown. These constant afflictions do not come to upset us, but to set us up, to strengthen our faith, to enrich our life, and to develop our spiritual muscles; and they are the material out of which the angels are ordered to build our ladders, by which each mortal can, if he only will, climb up to Almighty God. No matter what a day brings forth, if we only know how to climb toward God. In order that what we have said may not be misunderstood, we have some important concessions to make ere we close; for every truth of Scripture has its reverse side, and no one sentence can completely cover all truth, and those who think that this can be so are our half-thinkers, our

tissue-paper people. And such play their tune all on one string, while they very soon get out of tune and out of string. There is a looking forward to the to-morrow that is just, honorable, right, pure, and Scriptural. Every person is bound to provide for his family beyond the day, every one is bound to look out for the rainy days of loss, sickness, and death; and every human being is bound to look forward to the eternal days, and must study with all diligence all the possible grandeur of celestial hours. There is a vast amount of trust that must be based on the expectation of a future, both here and hereafter; and everything would stop at once without such a forecasting into and a boasting of, if you choose to call it so, to-morrow, for a righteous boasting braces all trade, glorifies all friendship, enriches all literature, and inspires all religion. Why, your ancient buildings, your richly supplied libraries, your splendidly endowed colleges, and everything that you build, sustain, and call lasting,—all these are a believing gaze into an unknown futurity. Every age lives for another age. Each century is but a magnificent mausoleum, built out of the efforts of the past. All our days are echoes and prophetic intimations; and this fact needs no illustration, for the proof is patent, clear, and beautiful. We must also be continually peering into the eternal kingdom; and this duty we would enforce over and over again, for it is the one leading duty of all hearts, and yet almost all hearts are apt to neglect it. Some think that, if they can only keep the vision of the celestial future at a distance, they can in this way somehow postpone the reality;

but that is not the case, and I rather think that the truth lies quite as much the other way, for those who stand with loving eyes gazing through the eternal gates are not any more quickly, and perhaps not so soon, invited to enter those gates,—certainly no sooner than those who look the other way, and who purposely put blinders on their eyes. I am very sure that, if any of us had the promise of a visit to the Old World,—a promise which we felt would certainly be kept,—we should spend a considerable part of our time in getting ready for the journey. We should meditate a great deal upon the splendors that were waiting to bless our aching eyes. We should pore over the books that described the localities which we intended to visit. We should talk a vast deal to our friends about our contemplated tour, while they would see the joy in our eyes, the quiver upon our lips, and the pressure of expectation flushing our cheek; and this would be perfectly natural, and I am sure that you all can realize this fact. Why not, then, I ask, with a tender, solemn, and sincere earnestness,—why not the same ardor, the same joy, the same throbbing heart, the same glittering eyes, the same rosy cheek, and the same expressive lips, when we think of that magnificent country that we all shall so soon visit, where mansions are built of material more precious than diamonds, where fountains flow whose healing and sparkling waters can never anywhere else be equalled, and where joys perennial are offered to the faithful traveller? Why should we not be all afire with enthusiasm as we think of this journey, which we know must be taken, and parts of which we

are taking with every breath that we draw? Are we not allowed to boast righteously of that to-morrow when we shall be ushered into the city of our God?

Know, then, forever the difference between the vain boasting of to-morrow and that holy boasting, or fore-looking, or prophecy, which will make us ready to do God's will here and glad to meet 'God's will hereafter.

IX.

HOLY TRIFLES.

“A handful of corn.” — Ps. lxxii. 16.

ONLY a handful of corn ; and yet, if it be planted aright, in the true soil, in the appropriate time of the year, and according to the sure laws of agriculture, the result will be a bountiful harvest, “the little one will become a thousand,” and time and eternity will rejoice, and cries of victory will ring through our souls and peal gloriously through heaven. So, I believe, is the result of every good book, of every noble thought, of every gracious word, and of every splendid deed, however trifling the occasion of the exhibition, modest its performance, and brief the appearance ; for, if the spider, according to Holy Writ, “taketh hold with her hand and is in king’s palaces,” so also is goodness mightily persistent, wonderfully determined, powerfully bold, and sweetly pervasive. And many a good thing of which you and I have been the author, and which perhaps we now forget, that was done in an exuberant moment of holiness, will rise up, comfort us, and bless us at the great day of remembrance ; while we shall wonder, each one exclaiming, Lord, dost thou mean that I have performed this great, noble, comfort-

ing act, that *I* was the first cause of all these glorious results? And it will be hard to believe that the mighty harvest sprang only from the "handful of corn" that we scattered into the air or dropped upon the ground. Such, however, is the law of life, such are the revelations of time, and such will be the glorious proclamation of eternity.

I maintain that one of the tremendous arguments in favor of goodness is the magnificent issues that leap even from the tiniest manifestation of it; for, if we can accomplish so much by so little, what mortal can calculate the gorgeous heights of improvement that we may climb, if we only put forth all our efforts, dedicate the best strength of the will, the richest aspirations of the soul, and the noblest cunning of the hand? Probably all within reach of my voice have performed a great many acts of kindness during the years that have passed, of which perhaps they have now no recollection; and yet they are recorded in the better land, marked also in the characters of both giver and recipient, and are sending their echoes through time and eternity, since, by a blessed and irrevocable law of heaven, every act of love helps two hearts at the same time.

I am stronger for the smile that was given to me the other day, and so, also, the one who gave it is mightier than ever before; and some of the most magnificent oases of my life have been caused by the slightest expressions of good will, gratitude, and love made by those that I had perhaps somewhat helped, and such were not aware how truly they were compensating me

by that coin which they accounted of but little worth. And so ever with all of us every day of the year. What lessons, then, are we to learn from these facts? We must never neglect doing good because we feel that we can do but little. We must believe that God is able out of little to make much; and we must not expect that the "handful of corn" will spring up at once, just at the instant that we sow it. We must not expect to live long enough to gather in all the harvest ourselves; and we must remember that nothing is little in the sight of the Almighty, the raindrop being quite as dear to Him as the ocean, and He having given as much attention to the rounding of an insect's eye as to the swinging of the earth around the sun. Bethlehem was small, the manger was small, the babe that the magi worshipped was small; and yet how really large all these, could a prophetic eye only have read off their future history!

Let us look a little closely at the things here to be taught. We must not refuse to do our little because it is not much. We must not turn away with disdain from small things, and we must keep head and heart and body and soul working on the right side. Oh, some one may say, because I cannot be a great hero, I will not be anybody; but foolish indeed such a talk as this, just as if the spark of the firefly were not quite as good in its place as the mighty light of the sun, and a dewdrop for its own work as brave as the ocean. If we would only all of us do what we can without idling away our time by groaning over the impossible, a great deal would be accomplished toward hastening the com-

ing of the millennium. The whole earth would begin to be thoroughly changed and consecrated; and all shallowness, hypocrisy, and miserable subterfuge would speedily take their flight.

But no. Some are apt to sit still and to cry out, It is only a "handful of corn"; and it is not worth while to plant that, for it would be altogether too much trouble. We will wait till we get a bushel, and then we will go to work. So they wait, so they never begin, and so they pass away to the other world, thoroughly unfurnished. Of course, everybody cannot expect to reach the highest mark at once, and it takes a very skilful person to do that; but, if we can only master one virtue at a time, let us do the little that we can. Nay, if we never accomplish any one great thing all through our lives, let us try to do our best. Then we shall never regret the efforts that we have made; and perhaps, too, by trying, we may become experts, so that nothing can stand in our way, so that finally we shall make clean work of every noble deed that we attempt to perform, and so that we shall be heroes or heroines before we know it. We must believe, too, that God is able out of little to make much. I claim that this is the very prerogative of the Infinite Power, and one of the great charms of His glorious benignity, such as ought to hold us in wonder, awe, and love throughout all time and all eternity. Look at creation, and see how it sprang from nothing; and ever since, too, what tiny seeds have been the embryonic parents of all the grandeur in the world! Look at mountains, valleys, ocean, forest, star, sun, at anything grand,

beautiful, inspiring, suggestive, awful, and sublime, Once these all were but a speck, a mote, a little twinkle; and they are now called to their new, overpowering, and glorious stateliness by the breath of Almighty God.

Had we stood some night with Abraham, gazing into the vault of the heavens, without doubt we should have seen some little streak of mist, and perhaps we might have said, "Oh, that is nothing, that will soon blow away, that is hardly worth a moment's thought, and let us look at something better"; and yet this very night look at the brightest star of the constellation, and I tell you that star was the infant stream of mist that, in Abraham's day, so met our ridicule and called out our scorn. God made the little much; and so will the law ever hold good, if you will only wait with patient trust, with a holy fidelity, and with an unyielding devotion,—wait for the glorious unfolding of God's magnificent will.

Some people sow their corn, and expect it to spring right up to-day or to-morrow or next week; while, if they do not receive an instantaneous harvest, they grow moody, peevish, discontented, and atheistic. But the Almighty does not move right away. "With Him a thousand years are as one day." He taught the law, "First the blade, and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear." He ordered the world to wait four thousand years before he sent his Son; while now nearly nineteen hundred years since the advent have rolled away, yet hardly the outermost rim of Christianity is grazed. And why should we poor mortals expect

such speedy results, when all nature and the workings of grace move so slowly? The way to anything good is step by step, and all the time we have a long and tough contest; but victory will come to the brave and the holy ones. One has sweetly said:—

“ Much in sorrow, oft in woe,
Onward, Christian, onward go!
Fight the fight, and, worn by strife,
Steep with tears the bread of life.

“ Onward, Christian, onward go!
Join the war, and face the foe.
Faint not! much doth yet remain,
Dreary is the long campaign.

“ Let your drooping hearts be glad;
March, in heavenly armor clad.
Fight, nor think the battle long:
Victory soon shall tune your song.”

Friends, a willingness to wait for the fruitage of the seed is the sign of a heroic mind, a trusting heart, and a stalwart soul; while he or she who turns back from the royal road, goaded by impatience, stung by restlessness, tired of trusting, and thinking there can be no apocalypse, because the grandeur is so long concealed,—such a one must be branded as somewhat of a traitor to God, is not worthy of the fullest Christian approbation, and must have a very weakened heart. So, too, we may not live long enough to see the harvest ourselves; for many sow, while others reap. For the summons from the Celestial Kingdom ordering us to “go up higher” will not always wait for us to finish

our work, but calls us off at seasons that frequently seem untimely, and when certainly the need for us on the earth appears the most keen, sharp, and attractive ; and yet all the same shall the harvest be seen,—yea, shall be garnered,—and the “handful of corn” will somehow find its blessed ripening in heaven. For our country and God’s are not so far apart but that the good here echoes there, so that really nothing spiritual is ever lost.

When a good person falls asleep, we exclaim, What an untimely death ! What a loss such a one was, cut off right in his or her usefulness, and at the height of his or her best fame ! But, friends, nothing holy is really lost. Not only are there left behind example, influence, power, and a golden record, but also quite as truly there will go into the Celestial City a grace, sweetness, loveliness, and sanctity that will be re-clothed,—there enlarged, enriched, hallowed, and made beautiful, and then sent back to us poor mortals for our uplifting, consecration, and redemption. The saint, too, who has seemingly left work undone here, undoubtedly looks down upon the result, helping on, also, all the time, the ripening, and richly rewarded and thoroughly compensated for all the sufferings and toils of the life in the flesh ; and no handful of spiritual corn can fail of securing its eternal harvest.

So, too, let us always bear in mind that nothing is little in the sight of Almighty God ; that oftentimes, when we say small, He says large, and, when we cry out insignificant, He is labelling the very same thing mighty. I would repeat, Bethlehem was small, the

manger was small, the babe that the magi worshipped was small ; and yet just think what has been the result of that magnificent littleness ! I am inclined to think that our best things have been amazingly small at the start, and also that our greatest characters had but very little to show at first.

So, when I only detect the seeds of goodness in a young man or woman, I am greatly encouraged ; for I dream of the possible future, I muse upon what has been done and what may be accomplished, I calculate the sure gains that will fall to a stalwart spirit year by year, and I have almost a conviction that the one whom the world calls not much now, will, in God's good time, become gigantic in holiness. For, when we get a few good principles with which to start, the problem concerning the apocalypse is easily stated.

Here is the gist of the whole matter. It must be spiritual corn ; it must, too, be the hand *full* of it ; and then we may trust, and we may be assured that God will prepare a glorious issue.

Now, my friends, have we all of us a few grand principles established in our souls, and would we sooner lose our lives than *swerve one inch from a strict adherence to those principles* ? I am afraid that too many of us live without any settled purpose. We say we will take things as they come ; but they come upon us like an avalanche, so that, instead of our taking them, they take us, lift us right off from our feet, throw us from our balance, and bury us with shame before we know it, simply because we had not the battlements ready, the powder prepared, and the cannon mounted, so that

we could make a stout resistance. And all our false steps are apt to be caused in this way. We did not dream of danger, we counted everybody as honest as ourselves, we thought that all meant to do about right, we were entirely unaware of the unprotected state of our own citadel; and so the enemy came, and soon bound us into his terrible mastership. But had we, considering the certainty of temptation, the frailty of human nature, and the thousand and one intrigues of Satan,—had we thought how unsupported all were who had no support but simply their own weak wishes, we should have planted our good corn right in the centre of our souls; and then we should have been safe, and this royal food would have been thus labelled: I will constantly pray; I will never, under any circumstances, state or act that which is untrue; I will never take from another that which does not belong to me; I will never encourage wrong thoughts and unholy desires; and I will bear in mind that the eye of God is ever upon me, and that no place is dark enough to conceal His great look. Ah! if these rules, that are really spiritual corn, were planted way into the centre of our being, were they always practised, and were they as much the law of our life as our daily breath is a law of our living body, then all the attacks of Satan would be in vain. We might get scarred, bruised, and badly wounded, but never overthrown. God grant that we may be thus armed, equipped, and sanctified for His service!

But how is this handful of corn to be found in the first place? Certainly, I would not have you for a

moment think that I deem you are able, from your own centre, to lift yourselves up to glory. You can do nothing to any effect. You cannot even pray without some help; and some one must show you what to do, how to do it, and must take hold of your hand all the time, aiding you to do it, and that some one is,—I adore his name, I would magnify his power, and I would bow at his feet,—that some one is Jesus Christ. And he has said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” If, then, we would be safe, cleansed, and finally crowned, if we would plant our handful of corn in the right place, and be sure of a glorious harvest, we must find our way through Christ, we must learn the nature of truth through his teachings, and we must firmly believe, and never forget, that the life that cannot perish is found alone through his precious help.

FAILURES AND ANTICIPATIONS.

“Not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off.”—HEB. xi. 13.

THERE is the great wail of the human heart, the mighty sorrow of all ages, the stereotyped moanings of the soul, the aching disappointment of life, not having the promises, the gifts, the desired opportunities, the grand success, the one dream of life, but seeing the prizes,—yes, seeing them, reaching after them, begging for them; but they are “afar off,” way into the dim future, perhaps forever out of our grasp, perhaps belonging to somebody else, and we want them, — oh, we want them so much! — *now*.

If any one could dissect spiritually each one of our hearts, and publish the result, and make a catalogue of our disappointed visions or postponed wishes or shattered hopes, of those things yet “afar off” for which our eyes are straining and our hands are grasping and our hearts are pleading, sad would be the statement, tearful the description, dreary our view of life for a while; and each soul would cry out, O God, why, why, tell us why! The dream of the boy or girl, of the young man and maiden, of the one in mid-life, of

all in old age, "afar off," coming, but not here, promised, but not fulfilled, or perhaps seemingly forever floating out of sight.

Quite a book might be written of the unattained desires, the unfulfilled hopes, the broken plans, the splendid dreams,—airy, but not substantial,—the postponed glories of our childhood. I know that we are not apt to treat this experience of childhood very reverently, very tenderly, very hopefully, except when we are in it, or when we recall our own biography, or when we read about it in a finished life; but, at the time when we are looking at it, it calls out our smiles or our pity or our blame, we not stopping to think that here one of the great dramas of life is being played out. I wish that these little ones could tell us what they see "afar off," could write about their visions, guesses, and panoramas, and sketch out their hopes, fears, and determinations, and could show to us clearly what they see coming as their prizes and what they are building up, called "castles in the air"; for then, I think, we should know better how to understand them, how to train them, how to prepare them for the real battle of life. But, oh, how much they conceal in the sacred citadel of the brain, how much they hide in the holy palace of their heart, how much they would not for the world speak out, so that human beings could have the faintest guess of the reality! It is a life within a life, and covered all over with a blanket, known only to themselves and to their God, that all children, to quite an extent, are living; and they are all the time building up that which must inevitably be shattered

before the mortal career is finished, or that which, if it comes, will take a long while to come, and the road to which at times will be heavy, painful, and dark.

Again, when we were young men and maidens, we were accustomed to see things "afar off." Young people build their castles in the air, and have their dreams, not to be expressed. I do not wish to lift the veil of these postponed or unsubstantial or shattered hopes; of fortunes made out of nothing; of hearts seemingly gained that never were found; of grand enterprises accomplished that never were begun; or of some deferred reality that is a long while on the way, and is wearing the heart out by its slow journey. Oh, no! I would not lift the veil; but I ask you now, in this sacred place, to lift it up to your own vision, and tell yourselves of those things "afar off" that you once thought so near, and tell me, Am I not right when I say that all of you, myself included, could show a mausoleum of seemingly buried hopes, or at least could show some terrible postponements, that give a fearful knock at the door of patience all the time?

So, too, the same lesson comes to all in mid-life and in old age, an anxious repetition all the time, a reaching forward for something that does not come, a looking back upon a dreary and unfulfilled past, a counting up of shattered desires; for all the way along, from birth to seeming death, are scattered the wrecks of visions.

Well, I am not disposed to think that all these failures besetting us all the time,—the unaccomplished desires, the great and sometimes grand and beautiful dream-land of humanity,—that this wiping away of longings

is meant for a punishment, or is sent by a vindictive power, or is even a great, black cloud overhanging our destiny, since, I am sure, in the end, either here or hereafter, we shall thank God over and over again that He, in His great wisdom, demolished even our best castles in the air, that He did not leave the shaping of our course wholly to our own counsel, that He permitted us often to be wounded in our best anticipations, and set us back, way back, many a time, when we wanted to go forward, when we felt that there was every reason that we should go forward, and when we tried, almost desperately, to break the bars down that caged us in,—yes, we shall thank God for His restraining hand, tremblingly, tearfully, and rejoicingly, by and by. I remember once I said to myself, looking at something I wanted to do, and yet seemed to be held back from doing, and the words seemed to come right upon my lips :—

Wait ! thou canst not know thy fate,
The hidden things that lie deep
In the counsels of God's state,
While we wake and while we sleep.

A weaving is round the throne,
Of all God's plans, good and pure,
In the present all unknown,
In the future all secure.

The Almighty's ways are grand,
But are hidden from our sight.
Of us all does He command
Holy waiting for the right.

I waited, and the glory came; and I wish that the laws regulating a printed sermon would allow me to tell everybody how gloriously it came.

So I believe it is ordered in the same way, wisely for us all, not as we wish or dream or pray it may be, but something better, something that will last longer, something that will bless us on earth and in heaven.

“Not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off.”

But there is another view that we can take of these words that is more comforting, perhaps; that is, although we may not get the prizes we crave, we shall see them, or something greatly better, approaching us, and the seeing of them shall cheer us all the way along the path of life. They will go before us, beckon us on, encourage us, and make our tasks easy, under the softening, uplifting, and strengthening light that they throw behind.

Perhaps, too, the seeing “afar off” that which will be ours if we are faithful will make us more willing to work hard now, will reconcile us to a good many sharp battles, will keep our spirits up, will make us brave, pure, holy, and hopeful, and will give to our work an added light, joy, and peace. If we can see the good time coming, know that it is coming, and know that there can be no delay after the proper time, if we do our part, why, then, we shall be all ready to stand in our lot, take up our burden, and march on without complaint. Yes, the grandest victories accomplished in life are built up out of the encouragement that has been given from the things seen “afar off”; and it is only as the

heroes and the heroines do see ahead that they become so great, successful, and glorious.

I am working, said a man to me many years ago, not for the profits that my business will bring to me, but so that I may become the first in my business, the leader in it; so that my word can be taken as soon as given, my honor be unquestioned, and my name be without a blot. That is my aim. Well, he accomplished what he sought. He beheld the prize in advance, marched forward, and gained it. It was "afar off" then, but it is his now, and he is well paid for every struggle, every sacrifice, and all hard toil; but so spiritually are the prizes always gained. We see heaven "afar off," when we are in our best moods; and, if we keep that sight clear, crisp, glorious, beautiful, and inspiring, if it hangs before us in all its majesty, why, then, every day we shall fight the good fight, and shall be strengthened, uplifted, and comforted by the lights from above.

These views helped the apostles, comforted the martyrs, and inspired all the great men of the Church; and they help every humble, seeking, praying, and loving soul to-day. Glory be to God!

Anybody can tell what sort of men we are, or what sort of women we are, or what sort of children we are, if we will only tell what sort of visions we see "from afar."

Have we been dreaming all through life only of fame, pleasure, wealth, and a butterfly existence? Have we been enthroning ourselves in the high places, and forgetting all about everybody else,—in fact, using everybody else only that we may mount up and up to fleeting

honors and to unsubstantial joys? Is it the great "I" that we are all the time worshipping, the "I" on the worldly side, and the "I" that we see placed on the throne? Well, then, everybody knows what we are, God knows what we are; and such a vision will belittle us, and cramp us, and injure us, every day of our lives. Every one that steers only toward the enthronement of self, and sees only that vision in the distance, steers toward destruction. But I trust that our dreams are all another way. I hope that goodness, thorough goodness, stands before us, and holiness, complete holiness, is "afar off," in our vision, as I hope sometimes that will some day be really ours that we are looking toward being accepted children of God, loving disciples of Jesus, and those who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. I hope that we are looking toward being great benefactors to everybody,—not crushing humanity, but lifting it up, helping hearts all the time, and blessing souls forever. I hope that the pedestal that looms up in the distance, on which we expect to stand, is broad enough to include all our brothers and sisters; and, should any not be found there, that it will be their fault, and not ours.

Ah! my brother and sister, what do we see "afar off"? Well, that brings us to our last point,—how do we view heaven that seems "afar off," but may be very, very near? Shall we know each other in God's city? Shall dear ones live together there? Shall we work as well as pray? Will it be very homelike there, only ever so much better than our dear home here? The "afar off" that we call heaven seems very near, but

one door between us and that place ; and, when we get there, our identity will be preserved, we shall all know and love each other there, and there will be many mansions there, the private homes of each of our families, and we shall do the work of God there, for our own souls and for other souls, and it may be for many souls upon the earth. And so, too, without doubt, we shall be gathered together in heaven for special seasons of worship, the Sundays of the Celestial City.

And will any be left out, you may ask me ? Well, God only knows about that ; but one thing we know : all can go there who wish so to do, who obey God's will, who follow the precepts of our Master, and who seek for large supplies of the Holy Spirit ; and, if the door should be forever shut, it will not be because God shuts it, but because we ourselves hold the door tightly, fasten it with locks, bolts, and chains, and are determined that it never shall be opened.

Glory be to God ! salvation is free. The call is to every soul, "Come." God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are not afar off, but close by, right here, and ours, if we will, forever.

XI.

THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION.

“Let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, one for Elias.” — MATT. xvii. 4.

THESE words were spoken upon a mountain that is now very sacred on account of that utterance, and because the steps of very holy travellers have been felt upon its glorious summit. You without doubt have noticed that all through the Bible there are special and striking indications that mountains are holy. All through the Mosaic dispensation, tingling through the sweet and splendid strains of the psalmist, running along in the rejoicing or the moaning of the Israelites before and after the captivity, gracefully decorating the teachings of Jesus, and fortifying and enriching the preaching of the apostles, is the great truth presented, and enforced, of the sublimity of immense heights.

It is now supposed that the transfiguration of Jesus took place on Mount Hermon, and that it was here where the apostle Peter wished to stay forever; and this was the place, as it is now thought, where the future glory of the Master was so beautifully foreshadowed. Here the air was clear, the prospect delightful, the seclusion and safety perfect; and here all vain desires

would be banished, all insinuating temptations disappear, all carking cares end, and it would be an eternal vacation for the soul, with nothing to molest or make it afraid. Why not stay here forever and ever? I do not wonder that the ardent Peter wanted to build three tabernacles in that blessed spot. This scene has a lesson for our daily living, for we all of us have our transfiguration times, our blessed and hallowed experiences, our vacations of rest and recreation that we would fain keep constantly within our reach; but we are to learn that the rough roads are to be travelled as well as the easy ones, the clouds are to be entered as well as the sunshine, and duty is to be taken up as well as joy to be embraced. There are several mounts where we all the time want to pitch our tents, the two most prominent of which are the Mount of Vision and the Mount of Victory.

First, the Mount of Vision. Splendid visions come only as the occasional oases of our lives in the desert, and are then so truly beautiful, so comforting, and so uplifting that we hate to let them go, and we would fain dream our life away under the glow of their magnificence; for we like the clear air of a burning truth, we enjoy the gracious outlook of a splendid fact, and the conception of what ought to be sends us to the ground at first, bewildered, and then starts us up again with the resolve that we will muse forever upon the holy possibility. We deem that it is well enough for us to think out the future; and then no one will envy us, no one will disturb us, there will be no vain tussling, no hard knocks, and nothing rough, teasing, and pain-

ful, but all will be as clear as a sunbeam. Let us stay just here, cry the enthusiasts, and do not ask us to speak, to explain, to teach, and to publish; for we like best the air of a quiet, solid, and holy contemplation. But all that so speak are cowards, for life was not made to be seen and met on its easy side alone. And the upper regions of insight, that are healthy, joyous, and holy regions, as far as they go, do not go far enough; and it is one thing to see a thing, but it is quite another thing to take it up, handle it, and work out its special, grand, and triumphal meaning, and application must be added to theory, ideas must be stamped by reality, proof must follow conviction, and dreams will never conquer the world and never scale heaven. An ideal life, of course, there must be; for you and I have great need of the gales of refreshing thoughts, as they are forced upon us from the topmost peak of a spiritual and mental Hermon. But we must descend the mountain, would we gain our richest strength, fall into the groove of our best culture, and cause a waiting world to be filled with beauty, holiness, grace, and power.

Again, we are too apt to stay content with the Mount of Victory and this is the way that so many men and women disappoint us; for they really do a few splendid things, and then seem to go into obscurity at once, as if a great success, reached once or twice in a lifetime, completed the hero or heroine, instead of really preparing him or her for an interminable number of contests, for the purpose of keeping up the credit and the solidity of the first success. There is no such thing

as standing still upon the earth, and counting up the prizes ; for, if we are not going forward, we are, insensibly it may be, but inevitably, losing ground. And, in our moral and our spiritual natures, we are called upon to wrestle all the time ; and every battle that we gain ought to be only the prelude to a greater one that must be fought. How many people there are who are satisfied with merely showing up and showing off their trophies, and who say, I did this or that ; but such are not our real heroes and our solid heroines, for those who are made up in the right sort of way never stop to speak of what they have done, but they leave that for outsiders to recount, while they march on to more work and more work, ever and forever more. Success may crush one's usefulness all to atoms just as well as failure ; and there are quite as many wrecks on the shores of gain as on the shores of loss.

"Our first scholars in college," said the late President Felton, "are but seldom the first men in the world ; and some of our young men who had but little or no rank in the academical scale have made their mark after graduation." This is very plain ; for the successful ones fluttered around their honors, built their tabernacles in the mountains of success, passed their whole time in counting up their transient gains, and of course died out of notice, fell from power, and were plunged into obscurity. It is a great thing for us to learn how to bear being successful, and not to grow small right away from the very moment of the consciousness of the fact ; and the constant rule should be with us, if we attain to a great victory to-day, that we must count

that victory as nothing, but go forward to greater gains, and so on and on ever. For really weak in the knees are we all, and weaker at the heart, if, after we have made our first success, we refuse to try any more, and go around the world telling everybody of what we have already accomplished. No, no! We must learn to keep our pride down; we must never give up the ship till the sinking time comes; and then, even as the upper deck ripples on the bosom of the waves, let the booming of the last gun be heard, that the world may find us alive and awake to the closing breath. I believe in always winning victories till the breath ceases. I think that there is something noble in never letting opportunity go unblessed; and I would like to have engraved on my tombstone these words, provided they could be truthfully uttered: "What he accomplished he accounted as nothing, as he beheld the little actual, as always brought into contrast with the tremendous possible; and he ever taught that there was something more to be done, and that no time could be given for resting on the oars." I know of no epitaph, my friends, of which I should be more proud than that, if, on the reverse side of the stone, it could be also stated that he believed all effort was futile without the inspiration of Almighty God.

"One for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." I think that there is a tinge of selfishness about these words that strikes one somewhat sadly. Here, for all time, the apostle wanted to stay with Jesus, Moses, and Elias, and in company with James and John. Why, he forgot all about the great crowd at the foot of the hill!

He forgot all about the other disciples ; and he did not bear in mind the then existing world, and the possible inhabitants of the future. But he wants simply a good time for that small company ; and he wishes that the great head of the lawgivers, and the great head of the prophets, and Jesus, who was priest, prophet, and king all in one, should belong only to three persons. His good fortune seems to make him fearfully exclusive ; and yet how like this experience to the experience of everybody in the full flush of success, from the little child with the cake or apple that is shared with but a few, while lots of wistful eyes and aching mouths are near at hand, longing to be noticed, or like the men or women with their few intimates, for whom nothing is too good, and their many acquaintances, to whom nothing is ever given ! Ah ! that little talk on Mount Transfiguration is acted every day in New England, and everywhere, over and over again ; for we do not like to scatter our good fortune all around us. We are willing that everybody should go to heaven, but we are not yet quite willing to give heaven to everybody here below ; and I sometimes think that there are those who expect to find “parks” and “squares” and “palaces” in the Celestial City for what are called the more prosperous classes, with smaller accommodations for the less fortunate.

Be this as it may, we are all too exclusive. We congratulate ourselves altogether too much when anything fortunate happens to us : we want our three tabernacles then, and only three ; and we are inclined to shut out from our good fortune all the rest of the world.

Do you remember that expressive piece of the poet? Let me quote some of it, for it is full of gracious meaning:—

“Cleon hath a million acres,
Ne’er a one have I.
Cleon dwelleth in a palace,
In a cottage I.
But the poorer of the twain
Is Cleon, and not I.
Cleon, true, possesseth acres,
But the landscape I.
Half the charms to me it yieldeth
Money cannot buy.
Cleon sees no charm in nature,
In a daisy I.
Cleon hears no anthems ringing
In the sea and sky.
Nature sings to me forever,
Earnest listener I.
State for state, with all attendants,
Who would change? Not I.”

So God, my friends, whether we will or will not, will make our three tabernacles large enough for more than those special few that we, with our short sight, have chosen for distinguished favor.

“One for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias.” May not the apostle have really had a good intention in the utterance of these words? and may he not have wanted a right easy place for his Master, as well as for himself? For he had seen Jesus suffer enough; and now he was glad that he was glorified, and he wants him to remain glorified forever. His heart is bursting with pity, and he wants to put an end to all further

pain ; but he was mistaken. He was carried away by his good nature : he did not understand a true Christian philosophy ; and yet he loved his Master, and, like an over-fond mother, wanted to shield him from all trouble. How like us all ! for we try to save our loved ones from that which perhaps, in the end, will be the making of their characters, the enriching of their hearts, and the glorifying of their souls. We think that the feather bed will be better for them than the hard board, or hovering around the furnace will be more safe than breathing the icy air ; and we want them in every respect very comfortable. But this have we yet to learn : that stalwart frames and massive souls are not thus made ; for oaks do not grow in hot-houses, and would wither if pelted by sunshine all the time. I think we must let our children sometimes meet with a little roughness, or else they will become some day what the prophet called half made. We cannot keep our dearest ones on the top of Mount Transfiguration forever. Of course, they look happy there, they shine beautifully there, and they have nothing but enjoyment there ; but, if we would have them truly grand, we must let them come down,—nay, we must urge them to come down into the valley, although, while we speak, our voices choke and our tears fall. Dear Christian friends, there is one splendid tabernacle that we can carry with us wherever we go, in the valley or anywhere, by the aid of which even dark places will be made bright, slippery places will become smooth, and painful adventures will be found full of good cheer.

Jesus is the true spiritual Hermon, and he will make

even work a rest, duty a delight, pain a pleasure ; and his companions are ever satisfied, wherever they may be, for they carry continually a smile on their face, diamond words on their lips, and they make every day that they live a real refreshment and a true mountain splendor. They have with them, too, not only the Saviour, but also Moses and Elias and the whole company of the prophets, the apostles, and the martyrs. Yea, verily, they have with them also the familiar angel forms that once in the flesh were near and choice, who are as a body-guard to their wavering steps, and to them there is no such thing as fail, no such experience as despair, and no word like death ; for they march along all the time with a band of heavenly music, with a choice celestial choir, and everybody loves to be near to the places where they go. Who of us have found and who of us are following this all-sufficing tabernacle, and who of us are sheltered by such a tent as that ? That ancient splendor of Hermon amounts to but very little unless we have made it a coronation to our own hearts, and have caught something of the bracing air of the glorious summit.

Finally, my brother and my sister, may the great tabernacle of heaven be your shelter throughout eternity, and may every child of God find a good tent on the other side ! If the call should come to-night, would we go forward singing "Home, sweet, sweet home," and sure, very sure, of the vacant chamber marked by our name, in the other city ? It is said that, after a fearful war, in which the English soldiers had been very brave, no sign of shrinking being seen even at the can-

non's mouth, no tear stealing down the cheek, and no heaving of the breath, the regiments returned to their native town, and, all at once, some one struck up that dear old tune, "Home, home, sweet, sweet home." Oh, then, what a shower of tears fell on those scarred and brown faces, what a trembling appeared in those seemingly marble limbs! for they felt they had arrived at home.

Will it be so with us, as we stand inside the Golden Gate?

"Let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, one for Elias." Well, if we will build these tabernacles in the centre of our hearts, in the cathedral of the soul, if we will have a perfect law of duty there that shall never be questioned, a prophecy of truth and righteousness there that shall always be honored, and the Lord Jesus Christ abiding there forever and ever, we shall be safe, strengthened, and glorified all through time, and all through eternity.

XII.

THE STRANGE INTERMINGLING OF EVENTS.

“As if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel.”—EZEK. x. 10.

IT is, indeed, very strange how the wheel seems to be within the wheel, as the events of life roll along, so that no human being can clearly read the message, prophesy the issue, and understand the revelation when it breaks forth.

The biography of each one of us is a grand surprise to everybody else, but, if possible, a still greater mystery to ourselves. What we meant to do we have neglected to do; what we never expected to see has come; what seemed sure has disappeared. Our victories and our defeats have both been unexpected, in a certain sense undeserved, and in every sense not of our own shaping or making, so that, if we were not Christians, and if we did not know that the Providential hand is guiding the career of time and the issues of eternity, we should be very apt to fall back upon the old doctrine of fate, and of course should be bewildered and shattered by doubt and by despair. Take any fifty persons that you have known for twenty years or more, and write down what you thought each would do and

each would become, and then, right opposite to your guesses and your dreams, write down what each one has done and what each one has become, and you will be astonished at the vast contrast. Your beggar will be the prince, and your prince will be the beggar; your dunce will be the scholar, and your scholar will almost be a dunce; and everything and everybody will seem to be turned the other way. I do not know how to account for these strange facts, unless we are each and all to be taught never to sketch the future of anybody, never to trust to our own poor judgment, and always to keep in mind that "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong."

Toward the commencement of this century, in one of the law offices of Boston there was an ungainly boy who was nicknamed by all his associates, and esteemed by everybody as but of very little account; and probably any one of his neighbors at that day would have predicted for him a very quiet and obscure and useless life. His deep-set eyes, overarching brows, and massive head, with a body not the most attractive, aroused no great notice among the crowd. Nay, one who daily met him at those times told me that he seemed only like a common boy, from whom not much was to be expected. Yet that person's fame as lawyer, orator, statesman, cabinet minister, and scholar has had an echo all around the world, and has given to America a power and a greatness of which we all should be justly proud; for, when you call the name of Daniel Webster, you speak of one who has been crowned all over the world as of imperial mind.

But this single case is only a sample of a thousand other cases, with which you all are familiar, where the result is greater than the expectation, and the guess but a miserable photograph of the reality. So I want to maintain that in all the circumstances of our lives there is a wheel within a wheel, by which our whole history is changed and mastered.

It does make a considerable difference at the start whether we are born in America or in Africa, of poor parents or of rich ones, in the line of intellectual power or from ignorant progenitors, successors to hereditary crimes or with a loyal and holy background tinged with glory and beauty all past ages. So, too, it is important where we go to church or to school, what books we read, what companions we choose, and what daily influences engirdle us. So, too, a vast account is to be placed to our disposition, whether it be calm or petulant, hopeful or sad. Yet, despite all these things, so important, so much to be considered and studied, and holding such an iron control of our destiny, something more, which nobody can exactly explain, has hold of us, and makes us great or small as we resist or accept the pressure. Of course, under favorable conditions of birth, it is very much easier for one to go through life a hero or a heroine; and the silver spoon that is placed in the mouth at the start is a help, an incentive, and a strong impulse toward success. Yet how many of these silver spoons have lost their lustre, how many promising babes have escaped into nothingness, and how many hot-house buds have wilted and miserably perished! It is by no means an assured thing that the

children of wealthy parents inevitably are to strike the highest mark forever; for, grand as are their privileges, and golden as is the promise of their future, they sometimes are dismantled by their very luxuries, and choked and smothered by over-much good fortune. The advantage, I suppose we must all concede, is very frequently on the side of those who enter the world unheralded, unsheltered, and unwelcome, jostled and shaken by penury, and battered and shattered by the storms of time; for, if they possess a nature of oak, they will show the value of their timber in due season.

Again, all must concede that the American has a great gain in his birth over the African, and is way ahead of him in the commencement; yet, as we read all history, way back in the twilight of ages, we have no reason for supposing that the one will always keep forever ahead of the other, through all time and all eternity. For, as you all know, Africa was once celebrated for the arts and the sciences, when this country was filled with savage tribes; and who can say but that there may dawn another day of brightness? So, also, a succession from ignorance, or an inheritance of crime, or a legacy of anything bad or weak, is terribly unfortunate,—a heavy blow and a fearful pull-back; yet despite all these things, and in the very face of them, have many been raised to glory and honor, and many too,—oh, sad it is to speak it!—even in a succession of rooted holiness, have gone down hill with a velocity fearful to behold.

Somehow or other, there seems to be a wheel within a wheel, an unseen wheel, whose mysterious whirl sends

a chant or a dirge upon the air, and cheers or saddens many a heart. So, in the start, growth, success, and decay of all the nations, we see examples of the same law. Be it Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Macedonian, Roman, British, or American power, everything is strange from the planting, culture, and full strength; and, then, how wonderful when decay comes, how strange, perplexing, exciting, way on to the end!

From almost nothing the start begins, by almost nothing glory comes, and then the light is put out quite as strangely.

Ah! we know not in what seeming trifles are the germs of empires, nor from what slight occurrences majestic power finds its embryonic decay. It is all one mighty entanglement, that can be taken apart thread by thread only by the wisdom that never fails.

I suppose, in the history of woman, this strange complexity is the most wonderfully shown in that step where she finds some one whom she intends some day to call by the dearest name of all. All at once she meets the appointed one, by no will of her own, in some strange coincidence, and he may be the very opposite to all that she dreamed, and she may, when she first sees him, declare that he can never be to her anything more than a stranger; yet a decree has gone forth in councils higher than mortals that the two hearts shall be made one, and the maiden all at once finds herself promising to be a wife. The one that wants her companionship may come from a distant land, and may wish to carry her away to foreign climes; yet she goes, for she is led by a way not her own and by a wisdom that never fails.

Ask her,—ask any married woman,—Has not the whole course of your married life differed from your youthful dreams, and yet somehow proved to be the guiding of a will better than mortals? Even when a marriage is unhappy, still then a heavenly hand may be in it by way of discipline, that the sufferers may learn forbearance, patience, trust, holy hope, and even in darkness see God's hand and the promise of better days. So do we find this strange combination of uncertainty, these side issues, and these interacting, interpenetrating, and contradictory forces in the growth of our moral and spiritual characters. Opinions and principles are formed very strangely. So also our growth in grace proceeds from a rule that overleaps and outwits all our shrewdest calculation. We go to a certain church because our father and mother went there before us; and so, from influence and association, we form our ideas, make up our minds, and just as strangely do we acquire our spiritual life.

Our souls are quickened by a tract handed to us on the street or by a stray passage in a sermon or by an earnest prayer or by a sudden sickness or by a sharp death or by some grand and sublime scenery or in some awful silence, when there are deep meditations and the inner voice is like a richly toned bell. Ah! in many ways does the Holy Ghost reach us, stir us up, bend us low, and turn us to better purposes and to a holier life.

A lawyer in a neighboring town was a scoffer at religion, deriding holy men. He laughed at the Bible, made a sport at all things serious, always had an

answer of ribald wit when any earnest appeal was made to his heart, and one night went to a prayer-meeting just for amusement; but that night God came to him through some simple words uttered by a poor brother, who spoke more wisely than he knew, and the talented infidel became a valiant Christian.

One of the most careless and reckless men of this city heard, as he supposed, the voice of God at midnight, rebuking his ways, and from that moment became a new man; and afterward he called upon all men everywhere to repent.

One of our most earnest clergymen, now with God, was once a complete man of the world; but one night he heard a young lady praying in an adjoining room, and most earnestly beseeching God to bless him and make him a holy man. And then that man, renewed by that invocation, gave himself up to God.

Ah! my friends, we might talk for weeks of just such cases,—of the wheel within the wheel, moved by the spirit of the Almighty, and legions drawn by the mysterious power into the folds of the “Good Shepherd.” So, too, often this wonderful, secret, and sublime power leads one to a serious review of the past life, and awakens to a deep regret the sensitive soul for the waste of years; and one has sweetly written of just this state of mind,—a female poet* of considerable power,—and thus she speaks:—

“ Make haste, O soul, and gather up
The hopes that once were thine,
That shone across thy darkened way,
Then, dark’ning, ceased to shine.

* Clara B. Heath.

"Gather the wishes, wise and good,
You harbored day by day,
And all the hindrances that stood
And mocked them in the way.

"Gather the fears that held thee close
Locked in their cold embrace,
When on the wings of faith you rose
To struggle for a place.

"How broad the outlook when we stand
Above our hopes and fears !
How narrow all the ways we planned,
Seen from the waste of years !"

Ah ! my friends, the "waste of years" is now a surprise as we look back. Those years gone that we meant should be so grand, beautiful, true, and victorious,—gone out in smoke, and hardly a bright trace about them. God be merciful unto us, and yet help us to a better way.

"As if a wheel had been within a wheel," so is the whole life of Christ "a wheel within a wheel," and all moving on to glory, honor, and immortality. Whether we consider the grand unfolding of the need of Christ from Genesis through Malachi, or his actual coming as set forth in the four Gospels, or his sublime life, or his splendid teachings, or his sufferings, so nobly met, or his death so grandly conquered, or his ascension, such a magnificent surprise, or his precious and perpetual presence, so beautifully revealed, it is all a wheel within a wheel, and each wheel stirred by angels and abundantly blessed by the dear Father and the mighty Redeemer of us all ; and may we all to-day take firm

hold of duty and holiness in the name of the Father and the Son, and canopied forever by heavenly splendor! For, after all, no matter what our experiences in life, behind, in, through, and above them all shines the glorious love of God. Saxe Holm has sweetly said:—

“Like a cradle rocking, rocking,
Silent, peaceful, to and fro,
Like a mother’s sweet looks dropping
On the little face below,
Hangs the green earth, swinging, turning,
Jarless, noiseless, safe, and slow,
Falls the light of God’s face bending
Down and watching us below.

“And as feeble babes that suffer,
Toss and cry, and will not rest,
Are the ones the tender mother
Holds the closest, loves the best,
So when we are weak and wretched,
By our sins weighed down, distressed,
Then it is that God’s great patience
Holds us closest, loves us best.

“O great heart of God, whose loving
Cannot hindered be nor crossed,
Will not weary, will not even
In our death itself be lost,—
Love divine! Of such great loving
Only mothers know the cost,—
Cost of love, which, all love passing,
Gave a Son to save the lost.”

XIII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESENT HOUR.

"Now is the accepted time."—2 COR. vi. 2.

IN that little word "now" there is compressed a vast deal of sacred power, solemn suggestion, soothing graces, and glorious inspiration, opening to the thoughtful mind a large field for penitence, resolution, comfort, and joy.

We are all of us very apt to brood over those things that we have neglected to do, or else we make large boasts of what we intend to do at some future day; but nearly all of us forget, or put out of sight, and seem to entirely ignore the vital fact that "now is the accepted time."

No matter what we have been, nor need we be over-anxious about what we intend to become; but let us ask ourselves what we are doing now toward our growth in grace, our real advance in holiness, our journey to the gate of heaven. And the importance of the present hour is the subject that I wish briefly to consider.

This hour is of vital consequence because it is the only hour of which we are sure, the period alone in which all past life is condensed, and toward which all

past ages somewhat refer; and it is the very moment when God is asking us for our immediate service, for the gracious, beautiful, triumphant, and holy surrender of our wills to His blessed will.

Then, again, delays are dangerous. Procrastination is a disease. Power of will keeps slipping away; and the longer we hold back from God, the more thoroughly will the road toward Him be hedged, clouded, and blockaded. Outside of the culture of the soul, too, in all business matters, and in all that relates to body or mind, the need of instant action is clearly indicated, at once recognized, and cordially and earnestly felt.

Ah! blessed be the present hour; for it is the gift of God, and right royally has it descended from heaven, marked with our names, filled with glorious possibilities for our special use, fragrant with the sweet, holy, and pleasant benedictions of the good Father; watched by a band of angels, all of whom wish us well; and full of the music of the celestial choir, who do what they can to make it beautiful, suggestive, and grand. And the time is all for us, and we may climb by its aid into mighty glory, and may surrender, by its solemn behest, all the weights that cling to us by the follies of the past, all the fogs that impede our steps exhaled by a previous inexperience, all the drawbacks of doubt, and all the darkness of despair. So, too, now we have an opportunity for a fresh start, the summons to a new hope, an appeal to our courage, faith, and love. How shall we greet the blessing? With thankfulness, but inactivity? with an acknowledgment of the grace, but a dismissal of its claims? with a request for a renewed

advantage, but a spurning of the offered prize? Shall we tell it to go, but to come again when we are less lazy, or less busy, or less impertinent, or less happy, or more modest, amiable, earnest, and true? Shall we say that its visit is at present of no importance, and its prizes of no value? We do not know with how much meaning the present is freighted. Our estimates are always too low or too high; and we forget the grand intonations of God's voice, tingling all through the events that daily greet us.

Mrs. Whitney has beautifully said:—

“Little birds sit on the telegraph wires,
And chitter, and flitter, and fold their wings;
Maybe they think that for them and their sires
Stretched always, on purpose, these wonderful strings;
And perhaps the thought that the world inspires
Did plan for birds, among other things.

“Little birds sit on the slender lines,
And the news of the world runs under their feet;
Little things light on the lines of our lives,—
Hopes and joys and acts of to-day,—
And we think that for these the Lord contrives,
Nor catch what the hidden lightnings say.
Yet from end to end His meaning arrives,
And His word runs underneath all the way.”

Yes, friends, we measure not present grandeur, the holy now, and this possible moment, but issue a draft on future days. But how do we know that time so despised will ever return? How do we know that opportunities once so splendid, gracious, and inspired will ever be renewed? Are we sure, also, that, should

another hour be given, equally freighted with the grandeur of heaven, and perhaps more so,—are we sure, perfectly sure, that we shall be on hand to grasp the treasure, or in the mind to understand it, or in the will to be moved by it? Who has given us a certain mortgage on the future?

Ah! the changes of life are so swift, the items of each minute are so uncertain, and life hangs so on a thread, that we can count on nothing but the very instant that we speak or act; and even then there may be a check, a crash, and a close. The only time that belongs to any one is now; and even that belongs to none but God, and should be used to His glory. My time is my own, does some one exclaim? Ah, no! my brother or my sister, not your own, and never so: only a loan, for the use of which you are ordered to pay a liberal interest, which will be charged faithfully to your account, in the great "Book of God"; and, if you say that there is no interest to pay, or that you will pay it all in one mighty lump, next week, or next year, or just before you die, you are simply accumulating a debt that will astonish your bewildered heart when all things shall be revealed.

Again, this very time is deeply sacred because toward it run all the converging lines of our past life, and into it also the rivers of all ages. Do we say that Adam is the oldest man of which we know? Well, by one reckoning, we are correct; and yet by another estimate the last babe born — born a minute ago, perhaps — is the oldest of all, for all the past meets in him. And so to-day, all our life, and all of all lives before us, clamor

for recognition, as we consider the posture of our souls. It seems as if Adam, Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, all the worthies of the Old Dispensation, the apostles, martyrs, heroes, and heroines of all times, were looking at us, pointing at us, urging us, and praying for us, that we may never forget that "now is the accepted time." So, too, your history, my friends, every part of it, from the time you took your first breath till this very second that you are reading these words, is bearing toward one end; namely, your thorough reformation, without any delay, and an instant yielding of your will to the highest will of all.

Ah! it is impossible for us to take up the threads of common or of personal history, and to so tessellate them together that any one can easily detect how each event pointed to the restoration of human souls; but, up there, in the Court of Heaven, we shall find the mystery all explained, cause and effect splendidly traced, and all things revealing the kind hand of Providence, that has so gloriously intersected every item of human experience.

I think, when we read the Bible constantly under the feeling of its immediate personal and glorious reference to our own hearts, we get more richly down into its sacred depths of beauty, and feel thrilling all through us its magnificent intonations of peace, beauty, and power. Then Adam and Eve are tempted, or Joseph is sent into exile, or Cain kills Abel, or Noah builds an ark, or David sings his psalms in Palestine, or Daniel stands true to his God, or each and all meet their special discipline, all in some way for us, and all as a contribu-

tion to our better growth, and all that we may get closer to Heaven.

So let us begin with our infancy and childhood, and trace along the events to the present hour, the gains and the slips, and see how everything tends to our immediate regeneration. So, too, to-day as never before is God asking us to be His children. More earnestly, lovingly, touchingly, if it were possible, than ever He has spoken, does He say, through the blessed Redeemer, "Come unto me." Not for anything that He may gain by the service does He speak, or for personal joy or comfort or peace, but only for our own best good; and the good Father wishes only our perfection. He would have us "to-day with Him in Paradise," because only as we try to make earth a Paradise do we secure our own real comfort; and He wants us to bend our wills to His will, but only because thus time and eternity will yield to us constantly the best fruits, and pour upon us the holiest gifts. Of course, the Infinite One must be happier when we are obedient, and must be grieved when we go astray; but it is all for our sakes that He desires to keep us holy, and it is all for our sakes that nature is so beautiful, grace so abundant, and revelation so grand.

What a profuse provision has been made for us poor mortals, and how all things call upon us to give ourselves up to the blessed King of kings! We find by astronomy that the sun is ninety-five millions of miles distant from the earth, four hundred times farther than the moon, taking four hundred times and five-fourths of a second longer to send its light upon the earth than

the moon requires; but to what does all this science amount, unless we learn by it that the spiritual light of God can travel billions of miles, if needed, to save one poor human soul? So, too, if the planet Jupiter, at its greatest distance, is six times and a half farther from us than the sun, nearly six hundred and seventeen millions of miles, what matters it, unless we understand that He who launched Jupiter into space is close to us, and urging us at once to belong wholly to Him?

It is said, too, that we now see the light of a star that was extinguished four thousand years ago, but so far away that its first shining has but just reached us;* but what of that, unless we remember that the rays of the Almighty have been shining from all eternity, and will shine forever and ever, upon all waiting, loving, and holy souls?

So, too, we are told that we do not see the sun as it now is, but as it was eight minutes before; Jupiter as it was fifty-two minutes; Uranus as it was more than two hours before; the star in Centaur as it was three years ago; Vega as it was nine and a quarter years ago; and a star of the twelfth magnitude as it was four thousand years ago. But what care we, as long as the "Star of Bethlehem" shines fresh forever, and will always bless, revive, and glorify the watching eyes of the soul?

Hail to the wonders of science, but all hail to the wonders of God's glory! And thanks to the Infinite One that nature joins revelation in inviting us to His holy presence, and in craving our instant, constant, and perfect obedience to His blessed will.

* Stars of the twelfth magnitude.

Friends, delays are dangerous in all processes of the soul's growth, just as any improper delay in the movement of the spheres above would throw us all into dire consternation. He who promises to lead a better life to-morrow, by that very promise sends a consumption to his will, and palsies his better nature; for he, of course, by his voice indorses the claims of God, while he postpones them indefinitely as something of no very pressing account. And what earthly friend would bear such an insult as that? Suppose one should come to us this very evening, and should wish to communicate to us something that concerned us vitally, and which needed attention at once, but we, while allowing the importance of the subject, said that we would attend to it when we had time, or when we should see fit, or when we were old, or when we were sick, or just before we died. It is something we need now, our friend says, and proves what he says; but we reply that we will not have it now, and not till we see fit so to do.

Ah! so we each and all treat God continually, and even those who try to do their best are somewhat guilty; for all of us come short of our high mark, and may the Almighty pity, forgive, and help us. But how is it in our business matters, or in all that relates to the health of the body or the culture of the mind? Are we apt to delay in these minor concerns? When the merchant hears of a good bargain which to-day can be obtained, does he say that he will attend to the matter in a few weeks? And, if one has a good customer that wishes to purchase largely right away, does he refuse to attend to the sale, unless the purchaser is

willing to wait a few months or years? Oh, we know better, for he feels at such times that there must be no delay; and, if needed, he will work even late into the night, if thereby he can advance his plans.

Again, if we have a consumption, or fever, or any severe sickness, is it usual for us to be perfectly easy, to refuse all medical aid, and to say that there is time enough for a cure when we get nearer to the grave? No, no! for action is taken at once,—physicians are summoned, all kinds of medicine are tried, and every human effort is summoned, that help may be gained; and not only, too, is the patient himself anxious, but all his friends are equally solicitous, energetic, and watchful, and everybody that loves him tries to cure him, and that right away.

Once more. Does the teacher tell the pupil to do nothing but enjoy himself, to let books and study alone, and that a few years hence will do for the culture of the mind, but for the present that there is nothing to be done but to eat, drink, and be merry? Ah! we know better; for we know that every minute counts in a mental race, that no time can safely be lost, and that all gains are through constant, heavy, and hearty struggle.

Just so are we to measure the laws that govern the soul; and with equal good sense and sound judgment are we to judge of our growth toward heaven.

“Now is the accepted time.” God will accept us now, but He makes no promises in regard to the future; and, unless we accept the invitation at the present hour, we make a great, fearful, and sad mistake. But who

is to go with us to introduce us to the great Father of all? Who is to show us the way to the mansion where the feast is given? and who is to tell us what to do, where to go, and all things needed for the new life that we propose to take? We cannot go alone. Nobody as frail as ourselves can go with us to any avail; but, thanks be to the good Father, He has sent us a Guide, Teacher, and an ever present Helper, even the Lord Jesus Christ. Saint Anatolius found his peace in Jesus; and he once said, and so let us say:—

“Fierce was the wild billow,
Dark was the night,
Oars labored heavily,
Foam glimmered white,—
Mariners trembled,
Peril was nigh,
Then saith the God of God,
‘Peace! it is I.’

“Ridge of the mountain wave,
Lower thy crest.
Wail of Euroclydon,
Be thou at rest!
Peril can none be,
Sorrow must fly,
When saith the Light of Light,
‘Peace! it is I.’

“Jesus, Deliverer—
Come thou to me.
Soothe thou my voyaging
Over life's sea.
Thou, when the storm of death
Roars, sweeping by,
Whisper, O Truth of Truth,
‘Peace! it is I.’”

XIV.

MANNERS.

“So was the king’s manner.”—ESTHER i. 13.

MANNERS, whatever we may think concerning them, have a great deal to do with morals, and hence they are necessarily strongly allied with Christianity; but, when we speak of manners, we do not mean merely politeness, fashion, courtesy, good breeding, and refinement, although all of these are ingredients of the beautiful compound; nor do we mean simply that one must be a gentleman or a lady, although this follows as a necessary result from the premises. But we mean a certain culture of the heart, that, like the old English ivy, climbs up into the head, folds itself about the voice, gathers around the hand, and overspreads the whole appearance; and this culture, or refinement, or courtesy, or holy politeness, is the same in the house, street, and everywhere. If we have this inward vine, the seeds of which are planted by angels at God’s command, we cannot help showing it; and we shall not need to boast of it, nor too arrogantly assert it, nor display a great deal of pride concerning it, for then there will be clear proof that we have none of it, and then it will be vainly seen that we have mis-

taken the counterfeit for the real. A large number of human beings seem to have nothing of this glorious ivy about them, and they are just as rough as they can be all the time. Some have patches of it visible only occasionally, worn, perhaps, as a mask in public; but ask a man's wife what he is, and ask a woman's husband what she is, and what will each one reply?

Let us look a little closely at this matter. What does the world demand of a man or a woman, that each may be labelled a gentleman or a lady? and then what is the Christian demand before such titles will be allowed? The world says, Be dressed neatly, speak in gentle tones, never find fault with anybody before their face, always express pleasure at meeting those whom you greet, wear a smiling countenance, give everybody you know a courteous bow of recognition, strive to be entertaining to your visitors, and never express weariness, even if they outstay all reasonable time, or, in other words, be irresistibly pleasant at all public times in dress, voice, and conduct; but be what you please when you are unobserved. But Christianity asks of us something different and a great deal more. It says, Always be honest, go no farther than you really feel. It insists that, although we are not obliged to wear our heart on our face, we must not reveal on our face what has no lodgement whatever in the heart. It maintains that everything must be charming about us, but it must be the fragrant vapor that leaps from the soul, genuine, hearty, and consecrated. It says we shall not say to those who call, "We are ever so glad to see you," when we mean that we are ever so

sorry. It says we must not say, "Do not go," when we mean, "Why in the world have you stayed so long?" It asserts emphatically that we tell a falsehood when we write our "sincere regrets," all the time jubilant that we can by pompous rhetoric escape a serious infliction; for it would crush all pretence, masquerade, and hollow insincerity at once, and yet it never advises anything harsh. There are plenty of words ^{not} coarse and rude in the English language that can be used that will not trench upon a prevarication, nor graze upon rudeness, nor be in any way offensive. If one comes to see us, whether welcome or unwelcome, cannot we honestly say, I hope you are in good health, and will not that be a sufficient greeting? And when visitors leave, whether their stay be long or short, is it not better always to say,—that is, if they are friends,—“Come again,” or to not friends, “Good-by,” which means, God be with you; and, when we would decline an invitation which we would not on any account accept, let us simply acknowledge the kind remembrance, for it was kind in even an enemy to ask us. There is always a way of escaping difficulty without sending our poisoned venom into the human heart, and without throwing over our own souls the sable cloud of falsity. But Christianity goes much farther than regulating our outside manners when we are dealing with the world, for it would make us gentlemen or ladies all the time, in every spot where we happen to be; and here we have to ring the home bell again, for it says to the husband, Speak kindly to your wife when in the house as well as when the ears of others are listening, and do

not think, it exclaims, that it is no matter now that the company dress is off. Ask a favor with deference, acknowledge one with great gratitude, and bestow one with a sweet kindness, and do not think that your position as husband abrogates all those duties of courtesy that you so cheerfully underwent and so willingly consecrated when you were engaged to that beautiful girl whom then you thought the best being God ever made. Many a lovely girl, who had good reason to suppose that he whom of all she loved best was the model of gentleness, has found as a wife the dove suddenly transformed into something very different ; but Christianity says, Be always the same.

Again, wives are addressed, for the dealings of the new religion are not one-sided, and it was never said by that religion that one sex was always wrong, and the other ever right,— oh, no ! for duty runs its golden chains around all souls ; and to you, wives, it says, Speak as well to your husbands as you speak to your other friends ; temper your voice when alone to the same pitch as when in company ; smile just as much when your front door is closed as when, the moment before, the parlor was full of company ; and strive quite as hard to please now as you did in those happy days when your heart was pledged. Be self-sacrificing, patient, cheerful, pure, and full of religious trust, and then you are true ladies, you have earned that honored name, and it will be wreathed around your brow in diamond letters. Fathers and mothers, be polite to your children, let the little ones see that you respect as well as love them, and then you will bind them to

your heart with chains of gold. Say, "Thank you," if they do you a favor, and "Please," if you ask for one; and let them see that you think a great deal of the dignity of their nature, and so lead them, by gracious steps, through the example of your own delicacy, into a most perfect refinement. And, children, politeness from you toward your parents is a duty that God enjoins, and from which you cannot without sin escape. Do not speak to your parents, and do not speak of them, except in the most respectful terms. And, brothers and sisters, do not presume upon your near relationship, as if it conferred a right for coarse manners. No such thing; and just as careful should you be of each other's tastes, just as generous to each other's failings, and just as considerate of each one's feelings as if you were dealing with a stranger.

Christianity says that the true gentleman or the true lady will treat every man, every woman, and every child after the highest principles of honor, be he or she rich or poor, high or low, learned or ignorant, matured or infantile; and here comes the enforcement of the recognition of the grandeur of human nature. How can we help treating well each one that comes across our path, when we know that each human being is a child of God, one sought by Jesus, one canopied by angels, a mortal drifting through time, and an immortal rising into eternity?

Certainly, our earthly policy is clearly marked out. We think it a very good rule here to treat with high consideration those whose kindred stand high, whose commercial power is large, and whose future promises

splendidly. A man, a woman, every child of God, has a diploma of claims, rights, honors, and each one has for kindred all the inhabitants of heaven, for property all the glories, comforts, and awards of the spirit and the word of God, and for future prospects, if faithful, an eternity of opportunity, progress, dazzling splendor, and magnificent work. Oh, I beseech you, treat, then, each one and every one well.

Good manners, good morals, and a thorough Christianity are one and the same thing; and, in fact, manners and morals never blushed into their full beauty, nor ripened into their rich power, nor escaped into their splendid apocalypse, until the new revelation burst upon the earth. And our behavior is wholly wrong unless we are bathed in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Some may ask, Was not the great sinner, Chesterfield of England, a perfect gentleman? Yes, in one sense he was; for he could make a good bow, enter a room handsomely, greet one with exquisite grace, talk, walk, and laugh in just the most taking way, and write exquisitely. But yet his inward emptiness, his hollow scepticism, and his tremendous nothingness made him only an automaton, a figure-head, and an image that was set to work on wheels; and he had no gushing, burning, and loving heart. Undoubtedly, those near to him felt that, with all his refinement, he was an iceberg; but just add to his character the Christian glories, and then he would have swept all England with his power, while his name would have leaped down the centuries enthroned on the just admiration of reverent students.

Manners that are unallied to morals, unshackled to piety, and are careering through the world under their own flag, will sooner or later meet with a defeat, and will swamp their victims in the depths of a most terrible mortification. We may perhaps be acquainted with some people who are, without any doubt, thorough Christians, but who are not entitled, according to human definitions, to the title of gentlemen or ladies; and two divisions may be made of this class: first, those who are by nature rather rough in speech or blunt in manner; and, second, those who, through the lack of a good education, fail to come up to the highest standard of a most thorough refinement. Some of our very best persons are sometimes those whose outside is somewhat harsh. They talk quickly, loudly, decidedly, and sharply; but at the heart they are bubbling over with good will, and are filled with noble, splendid, rich, and unceasing plans for the good of the race.

All through our life, we meet those to whom, if we were to judge them by the exterior alone, we would do great discredit; for we should thus arrive at no idea of the wealth of their goodness, the largeness of their heart, and the holy electricity in their soul. While occasionally, among some of those whom we have the most distrusted, with great care avoided, and have wished all the time a thousand miles away, have been those who were charming in their personal appearance, with voices made of honey, with faces wreathed with smiles, and with good wishes as long as the moral law; and yet have we felt afraid, uneasy, and a little sceptical in regard to their perfect sincerity. And many a

time have we seen a man or a woman toward whom our heart said, Hypocrite, while we had to put iron bands on our lips, lest they should say the same thing also. But some may say, How is it that the truly good man or thoroughly kind woman can be in any way rough? Well, the difficulty is wholly one of organization; and yet, after all, most people are not so severe as they seem to be. For, if we look closely, we shall detect a twinkle of love in the eye or see around the lines of the mouth a great good nature; and may it not be that such are wearing a mask only that we may not know how good they are? They make a mistake. They should let their light shine; they should not hide it under a bushel; and they ought not to wear a mask. However, we can much more easily forgive them than we can those whose outside is the dove, but whose inside is the serpent. I think we can all readily see that we do not quite understand the great grandeur of that title "gentleman," since we all shudder and seem to think it slightly irreverent when any one says that our dear Lord, during his earthly mission and when wearing the human garb, was a true, noble, finished, and holy gentleman. Why shudder? Was he not on earth in his human nature a gentleman,—gentle in his looks, gentle in his speech, gentle in his teachings; gentle in his promises? and did he not always know when to do just the right and just the appropriate thing? Did he not respect everybody in their proper position? And does it not seem an unquestioned truth that the more we copy him, so the more, continually the more, do we become lovely, attractive, and beauti-

ful to all with whom we meet? Jesus not only came to make us ready to be saints in heaven, but he came quite as well to show us how to be useful and how to be agreeable here. If we are what we are ordered to be, "humble," "meek," full of "hunger and thirst for righteousness," "merciful," "pure in heart," "peacemakers," and "the salt of the earth," have we not every ingredient by which we can become the most beloved, honored, and accomplished, gentlemanly and ladylike people in the world? The man of God has every preparation for becoming a man of the world; that is, the world's most useful man. I am aware that many Christians, through a gross perversion of their faith, have led us to think somewhat differently. They certainly have dressed up their belief in the most sombre clothing, have pointed a finger of scorn at nearly all the innocent pleasures of the earth, have shut up the believer in a perfect framework of prohibitions, and have said, We must not go here nor there, but must sit still and wear iron collars on the neck, blinders on the eyes, put manacles on the hands, and bid all pleasure begone.

Not so does the Bible teach; not so does Almighty God direct, or Jesus Christ advise; and not so does duty require. We are taught to love the world, and to so love it as to engirdle it in sweetness, bathe it in prayer, and scatter over it the flowers of affectionate service. We are sent here to have choice manners, sound morals, and a happy religion, so that, by our conversation, life, and all that we are, we may lead many to walk into the road that opens toward the holy

city; and this is a call upon all of us, and God grant that all may heed it well.

Let us look after our manners, for we must remember that they are the first cousins of morals. Let us look after our morals, for we must remember that they are the brothers and sisters of religion. And let us look after our religion, for we must remember that it is the handmaid of God.

THE DECAY OF THE SOUL.

“Our lamps are gone out.”—MATT. xxv. 8.

YES, our lamps are gone out, or else they flicker or smoke or give but little light, or do not give all the light they should, while to a great degree, in the most important sense,—and that is the most sad reality of all,—the responsibility is ours. It is our own fault that the lamps inside the soul have gone out or have become feeble, or that they neglect to do their full, blessed, and holy work.

I know all about the many excuses that are offered when spiritual failure takes place, such as the force of circumstances, the immature will, a defective education, the pinching stress of want, and so on,—a perfect phalanx of stereotyped apologies; and yet I declare that all these obstacles, be they as weighty as they are,—nay, ten times heavier, sharper, and clearer,—will not balance one feather's weight against the opportunities, bounties, illuminations, graces, and sanctification that are offered, given, pressed, and almost forced upon each seeking soul by the watchful, loving, tender, and holy Jesus. We are never left unseen, unaided, and alone. In the boat of life there is always a pilot, and he will

turn our course heavenward just as soon as we sincerely beg him so to do; and yet how prone the human heart is to brace itself up with a large number of excuses, which fact, after all, is perhaps the highest compliment that vice can pay to virtue, since the uneasiness which frames an apology is a tacit acknowledgment of the thing desired, neglected, and abused! We do not take the trouble, nor do we spend the time, nor do we throw away our voice, in order to give excuses for the neglect of that which is of no consequence whatever, which is better undone than done; and there is some hope for the man or the woman or the child who mumbles out a seeming plea of justification, for then we may be sure that underneath the heap of ashes which obscure the soul there are sparks mouldering, slumbering, restlessly sleeping,—sparks it may be all prepared to be started into a flame and perhaps ready for a happy conflagration, if only lighted up by the breath of the Holy Spirit.

Glory be to God, there is hope for the uneasy, unhappy, restless spirit. The stirring waters prove that there is life left, and where there is life there is always hope, and when there is hope heaven looms in the distance; and it is only when people become blocks of marble, pyramids of iron, and cakes of ice that we are inclined to give them up, for then there seems to be no real place for the proper impression of goodness, life, and peace.

“Our lamps are gone out.” With everybody, this is true, to a greater or to a less extent; for we are not only not what we desired to be some years ago, in our

bright, holy, and joyous dreams of coming days, but we are also, in some respects, terribly behind the spots of verdure that in our earlier years made the prospect of our lives so green, beautiful, and electric. For our innocence has gone; and that instinctive throbbing toward good, which like the compass always pointed one way, has partially faded out, and has been somewhat eclipsed in a maturity that smothers as well as ripens.

If the children of innocence were always honor, holiness, and truth, it would be well; but too often the offspring have to be labelled "sin," "shame," and "death." The boy of fifteen and the man of thirty are sometimes so vastly different that not only hardly a vestige of the youth is left on the frame of the man, but also in mind, in soul, and body are found no throbs, no echoes, and no impulses of earlier years.

Good Father, save us from running down hill so fast! Put brakes, we beseech Thee, on the car of the will, and by Thy omnipotence wrench us from the road that leads to death. How many there are upon the earth who want to begin their lives over again! I do not agree with them; for, whatever my spiritual defects may be now, I would not, on any account whatever, begin the race again, through fear that I might do worse. And yet vast is the multitude who cry aloud or in the depths of the soul, Give us another chance! and this bitter cry points to a sense of failure and to a feeling that existence has been down and not up, has been marshy and not solid, has been in the valley of humiliation and not on the topmost peak of

the highest mountain of duty. How many are there in the world who are perfectly satisfied with themselves? Not one, I think, is thoroughly content; for we all know of a good many things that we might have performed better. We know of a great many more things that we should have let alone; and we know also of a vast amount of duties that we have let slip through our hands,—duties that we cannot now run back and pick up. We began our lives with a vast amount of oil in our lamps; but we have been gradually using it up, curtailing fearfully our supply, and neglecting all the time to get furnished with more material, so that now we only flicker, smoke, and twinkle, making but a faint impression upon the darkness all around us. We have lost something in power of will, in tone and color of imagination, in clearness of reason, in solidity of judgment, in depth of emotion, in purity of character, and in the whole posture of our religious growth. Let us look at this matter somewhat closely.

The loss in will. We began our lives with a vast amount of splendid resolutions, sacred promises, and holy hopes, made to our buoyant imagination consecrated vows placed upon the altar of the future; and these pledges looked well as they were hung in their magnificent frame of faith upon the walls of our souls, and no one would have thought, in the freshness of their beauty, in the brilliant light of their immense worth, and in their glorious splendor, that they could ever know tarnish, or feel the wear of time, or be coaxed out of their regal glory. We *promised* well, thanks be to God even for that. But did not a change

rapidly fall upon the spirit of our dreams, and did not temptation paint its blush upon our fair face, and send its cold tingle through our nerves? and then soon, too soon, did we not lose our tinge of shame, and break fellowship with the noble standard that had been raised up by our splendid dreams? We called the change, it may be, a becoming acquainted with the world; but we should have called it a knocking at the door of the house of his Satanic majesty.

Again, we have lost in the tone, color, and atmosphere of the imagination. There is something very charming about the imagination at our early stage of maturer growth; for greater paintings than Rubens or Raphael or Titian ever produced have been formed on the canvas of a youthful brain, and there have been dreams of majesty, goodness, and holiness that would have startled the world, could they only have blossomed, bloomed, and blushed into reality, and the millennium would have come long ago if we only could have made our best thoughts tingle in our deeds.

Act out, young man and young woman, those grand ideas of duty that now seethe so furiously through your brain, and that almost make you wild with spiritual delight, and do not let them stay in the coffin of the flesh, but let them out, let them fly, let the chrysalis be broken, and then beauty, glory, and magnificence unparalleled will fall upon the earth, while up in the courts of heaven will be heard the hosannas of the angels; but, if you keep them caged for any cause, on account of modesty or timidity or inexperience, then you will begin to lose power, the visions will grow dim,

and your "chambers of imagery" will be filled with dust or with rust, so that nothing will be left but the ashes of the past.

Again, we have become clouded in our reason. We know how to reason truthfully when we stand in the full tide of our best desires, when we spell good much easier than we spell bad, and when that the spiritual two and two makes four is no matter of doubt, and never falls into the lap of ingenious criticism and under the sifting of a metaphysical disputation; but soon, however, unless we give heed to our early convictions, our way of seeing will get cloudy, we shall lose our logic, all our faculties will become bewitched, and we shall get tangled all up with doubts, covered all over with denials, and smothered all over with sin. How many wretched specimens can be found in this world of those whose reason is befouled and dethroned, of those who know not a spiritual *a* from a spiritual *b*, and of those who enthrone doubt for faith, and elevate their own empty guesses for realities most sacred! May God have mercy upon such terrible foolishness! Reason is good in its place; and it has, too, a very important place, while, unless it is honored, obeyed, and unjostled in its right position, we shall soon all of us be buried up in self-conceit, and all the avenues of light, duty, and glory will be blocked up. But our reason must keep its hold on the battlements of heaven, must never forget its subordination to the Almighty Will, and must listen for the corrections, inspirations, and glorification of Almighty God.

Again, our judgment grows weak. Every one is

capable of having a good judgment, but how few possess it! Are we not hasty in decision, bribed by prejudice, jostled by temper, and excited by self-interest to be on the wrong side?

Upon certain things we boldly assert that our mind is all made up. But how is it made up. Is it our mind, or is it our temper? Is it our mind, or is it our purse? Is it our mind, or is it our ambition? Tell me, is it our mind or Satan's? So, too, as we grow older, our emotions are apt to grow weaker. Ossification of the heart is a very common disease at the present time; while it is sometimes brought about by undue rapidity of business, by fraudulent fluctuations of prices, by the many dubious shifts of trade, by profuse-dealing in stocks, by close dealing with notes, by hard driving with mortgages, and by several other preliminary steps well known to everybody. We in Boston begin life very kindly disposed; and we keep then an open hand, free heart, and generous soul. All in trouble obtain our real sympathy; and we look about to see whom we can help, bless, and set forward. A change, however, is apt to come, caused by our fault or by the weakness or the wickedness of somebody else who has deceived us; and then a coating of stone forms around the soul, so that the worthy and the unworthy storm the inward walls in vain. We call such a hardening a knowledge of the world and a needed wisdom; and so it is to a certain extent. But it is a one-sided acquaintance, a defective wisdom, and a rough experience,—just as if we should eat the skin of a peach, and call it a peach, and have no conception

of the lusciousness of the pulp that the peculiar skin so gladly conceals.

Once more, purity of character is apt to suffer as we progress in life. Faces alter, and so do souls; and oftentimes sin stains through the face, so that the countenance betokens what is going on in secret. We have known youths at sixteen who were the pattern of all that was lovely, and by merely gazing at them we were blessed; but look at some of these same youths at thirty, and what a change! Not a feature can we trace like what we once admired and loved. Do you not remember the beautiful eye, full-orbed, large, clear as crystal, and beaming like a sunbeam? Look now at that same eye, inflamed, swollen, sickly, and the sparkle all gone. I tell you guilt is stamped there. Do you not remember the smooth skin, glossy, fresh, and every way attractive? But now the face is worn, pale, and hollow, or else it is too large for beauty, and very rough and repulsive. Do you not remember the expressive mouth, that seemed to have engraved on it religion, holiness, and everything good? But now that mouth is out of shape, coarse, and deathlike. I forbear. You all know of such changes, and they are too sad to relate; and the heart aches as it recalls them. The lamps are almost extinguished, the soul is decaying, and it is dark, it is very dark; but, oh, let us try, and let us see if we cannot get some oil for these unfortunate ones before the Bridegroom comes.

In the whole posture of our religious life, we are apt to go back. I want to ask you, my brother and my sister, about your last ten years. Have you grown

in that time, spiritually? Are you nearer to God, Jesus, and heaven than you were at the beginning of the decade? Is Sunday a day more and ever the more appreciated? Is the Bible a book more and ever the more loved? Is prayer a habit better and ever the better kept up? And is duty closer and ever the closer followed, although the gain of the soul be the loss of the world? Let us take our account of spiritual stock, and then let us see on which side the balance lies? I think it must be an awful feeling for one who finds himself ten years behindhand. I can imagine, in material matters, how sad the merchant must be, who, after casting up his whole account for twice five years, finds himself poorer than at the start. How he shivers at the idea, how he calls the whole time a waste, and how he bewails his ill luck, and how his whole nature is at unrest! But, friends, I cannot imagine, neither your vision nor my thought can fully measure, the soul of that man who, as life struggles with death, finds that all the merchandise of his spiritual nature is but dross, all that seemed to be gold is but brass, that all he called diamond is paste, that the whole foundation labelled stone is sand, and that there is nothing left but a ruined life. What will that man say, when he sees the lamps all gone out, the oil used up, the shops all closed up, and the door about to be shut? O God, have mercy on an experience so sad!

I suppose, if we had lived seventy years, and every day or week in those years had carelessly dropped a diamond, we should be a little curious, at the end of

that time, to know how much of a fortune we had thrown away; and the natural feeling with those gazing at our prodigality would be that, notwithstanding we had lost so much, without doubt we had a vast supply in reserve. Friends, we have been dropping spiritual diamonds ever since we reached the age of responsibility; while every one which we have lost has made us more poor, since we have had no stock in reserve which could be called inexhaustible.

I presume that the head of a pin will be found more than three times too large to hold some souls that can be found in the world to-day; and some may think that even this statement is too generous, and that we should reach the truth more closely by stating that some souls are so attenuated that the head of a pin would seem to such of giant size.

"Our lamps are gone out." No, they are not wholly dead, for they never can wholly expire as long as there is a consciousness of loss; for, just as long as we yearn for goodness, there is a chance for our restoration. Just when the desire for reform will cease none can say, and yet all the calls of religion are now: delay is ever spoken of as dangerous; and it was once said, you know, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." While Jesus stands at the door knocking, let us open, and, oh, we must not let the lamp go out. It is bad enough to have it smoke, it is very trying to see it flicker, yet better both than actual darkness.

Jesus is ready to give "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit

of heaviness, that we may be called trees of righteousness, and the planting of the Lord"; and why should we delay to accept the magnificent gift? How foolish it is in us that we let our light go out when it might flame up so high, sending a dazzling lustre even into heaven!

God grant that our souls may never begin to decay, but help us that they may grow more beautiful, bright, serene, and sacred, until they find their glorious apocalypse in the presence of the assembled angels at the "great white throne"!

God has helped us, saved us, and by His stripes as well as by His gifts has rebuked us, and all the days of our lives has been appealing to our better natures. Alice Williams has said:—

"I know, dear God,
These keen strokes of Thy rod
Have turned me from deep mires
I might have trod,

"And often hath
That which I deemed Thy wrath
Been tender love to keep me
In the path.

"All chastisement
Which by Thy hand is sent
Is for my chastening, not
For punishment.

"Give me each hour
Some token of Thy power,
So shall the heart rejoice,
Though storms should lower.

“Thy presence still
Goes with me. Good or ill,
Whate’er befalls me, it is
Thy good will.

“Then in Thy way
Still lead me day by day.
Thy will be mine, mine Thine,
Dear Lord, I pray.”

XVI.

JESUS CHRIST THE TRUE FOUNDATION.

“Other foundation can no man lay than Jesus Christ.”—I COR.
iii. 11.

AN ancient philosopher craved a basis for his lever somewhere outside of the earth; and “then,” he said, “he would lift the world.” Now, the anxiety of this wise man that he might manage matter by getting outside of it, and his yearning for a foundation that was different from what he could make or see, or perhaps even dream with a clear conception, very well typifies the state of a thoughtful mind that surveys the ages and becomes shocked by the conflicts of opinions, the force of trifles, the authority clinging to mistakes, the wonderful confusion of ideas, and the slight, brittle, and decayed supports of existing customs that from year to year have received credit, admiration, and applause. Outside of all these difficulties, prevarications, follies, and foibles, such a mind desires to stand, and longs to find a basis by which all seeming inconsistencies may be lifted into clearness, made obedient to a critical management, and forced to give a spiritual nourishment, peace, strength, and joy.

The mathematician of old longed in vain for a new

position for his lever, and he could not get out of matter until he got out of himself; for the laws of his being confined him, and his very existence was a stern protest against his desires. But, thanks be to Almighty God, very different is the case of the Christian philosopher who, bewildered by a survey of history, overcome by the trifling circumstances of each day, and entangled by constant surprises, mortifications, and defeats, seeks some clew to events, some orderly arrangement of thought, and some independent force that can help explain the mystery of life; for this man can reach an outside position, and can stand there out of all fog, raising by his spiritual, lifting power all difficulties into a blessed, holy, and triumphant light.

We are here in this world, confused, unhappy, and sinful, feeling the weakness of ourselves and others, noticing the instability of all governments, persons, and things; and so we crave relief, we want to upheave doubt, difficulty, danger, and we know that, while we are in their circle, are bound by their laws, subject to their stings, and depressed by their restrictions, we cannot escape into freedom, life, and power unless we can rest our spirit lever on a support independent of the world and its changes, and can place it on somebody or something, "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

Jesus Christ supplies the power that we need, in order that we may master earthly thoughts, cares, pains. He is the foundation, and there is no other on which to build our present peace or our future hope; and we wish to show in this discourse that ideas, action,

and faith all gain their freshness, beauty, and eternity from the infusion into them of the Redeemer's spirit.

Before the advent of Christ, ideas were shadowy, volatile, sensual, foolish, and only in a few cases prophetic, hopeful, and celestial. The Jews were a people of no great power, while they were small in numbers. Philosophers were scarce, and the large mass of the human race had lost all hope in themselves, each other, and God ; for they lived like beasts, met death stoically, frantically, stupidly, and had no time for thought, so that even the moments of light that will, despite preparation or resistance, gleam upon the darkest minds, were considered or labelled as illusive visions. And yet in all ages of the world there have been those who, notwithstanding their lack of the light of Christianity, have spoken weighty words, cherished inspiring thoughts, and been prophets full of hope, vigor, and celestial strength, and have, Socrates-like, despised life and death, but feared eternity. Even the Hebrews, who would not acknowledge the Saviour, devoutly worshipped God, and in many cases zealously advocated duty. Still, in these prophets or among these Hebrews, everywhere among men before the Christian era, we shall detect a void, a want, a yearning, and a lack of completion, by which a sadness is made to creep over their tones and dark clouds settle upon their lives ; for they all need the one great, sublime, and everlasting support, and they will lack full peace, sweet glory, and real splendor until they obtain it.

Look at action before Christ, and then you will see that it has no basis, is filled with no unction, refers to

no great end, and springs from doubt, or difficulty, or pain ; that it is spasmodic, speculative, and hap-hazard ; that it is the child of inclination, and has no sacred affiliation to duty.

In cases, too, where performance is noble, pure, blessed, and ornamental both to earth and heaven, courageous, honest, and sublime, in cases like the affection of Damon with Pythias, that led each to wish to die for the other, or like the courage of Arnold Winkelried, that sacrificed a body for the good of the people, or like the bravery of those few who have crowned Thermopylæ's Pass forever, or like the deeds of all those who, not knowing Christ, have lived like him,—in these cases, such action, in all its grandeur, beauty, and power, must be attributed to the overflowings of a rich instinct, or to minds which, although denied the privilege of scaling heaven, have yet had natural vigor enough to fill the earth with a sweet greatness, spreading a holy fragrance throughout all time ; and such cases prove the splendid possibilities to which a God-given nature may reach when the Almighty shall see fit to open to such nature the gates of intuition, the full flood of inspiration, the whole grandeur, the mighty sublimity, and the sweet beauty of revelation. Such persons as we have named would convert the world if they only had the outside stand.

Again, faith, without the light afforded to it by the coming of the Son of God, has no true existence, is chilled, wavering, and dull ; or if, in exceptional cases, it be very serene, brilliant, and splendid, those cases prove good the general rule, showing the need of a

fresh communication from God, with an interpreter of the message.

Of course, God has never neglected His children. From the beginning of our creation, He has in some way revealed Himself, and has written His awful, glorious, and paternal name on every beam of light, on every star in the firmament, on every drop of water, on every quiver of the electric fluid, and on every breath of the body; but the race could not read the inscription plainly, gave different meanings to the letters, threw their explanations into perfect riddles, and in their very perplexity plainly revealed the need they had for a Teacher, for a Foundation, in whom to trust, and for a Prophet who should throw wide open the doors of the past, give a golden consecration to the present, and afford happy hints of the glories investing the future.

Jesus Christ came into the world just at the period of its greatest want, just when the mind ached most for light, just when the heart of man was getting soaked in selfishness, just when all hope had become despair, all light had become darkness, and all prophecy seemed vain. What a change comes over the earth after this celestial visit! for ideas are glorified, action becomes drained of its weakness and charged with a splendid power, faith is no longer based on shadows, but stands unshaken and crowned; everybody and everything assume a new shape, richer colors, and a greater magnificence; all vapors are dried up, all horrors fade away, and all Satanic devices are baffled; virtue no longer hides itself in a corner, patience is no longer

ashamed of itself, goodness stands justified before the world, and heaven and earth seem to be united, while the distance between the two is not very great, so that the ascent from the one to the other becomes a charm, delight, and benediction.

If Christ, then, brought so great a light into the world, and if without him everything was in chaos, and with him all sink to order, peace, and glory, what shall we say concerning the great question that has vexed so many scholars, for so long a time, concerning the ability or the disability of man? For the consideration of this question comes just here, as we are sifting history, and as we are getting its valuable testimony on this very point. We are nothing, in any way, say reverently one party, without Christ, and all our power, wisdom, and purity stream into us from him; and all of us would have been utterly lost, physically, mentally, and spiritually, were it not for this power, instant or reflex, of the Son of God. And another party boldly say that they are shocked by these views; that they deem them a satire upon God's government, a shameful abuse of God's child; and they, sadly vibrating the other way, exclaim that man is everything of himself; that God has so made him that he needs no helper outside of his own resolutions, no Saviour but his own will, and no Redeemer in any sense whatever but his own right arm; and they say that human greatness cannot be limited, and that a man's basis is within himself.

To my mind, both these parties state an extreme truth, that, unbalanced by its opposite, borders upon an untruth; for the fact rests midway between them. If

we say that man is absolutely nothing, or if we say that man is absolutely everything, we blaspheme the Maker; but, if we assert that man can do all things, through Christ helping him, we reach the strict truth. For then we allow that there is an original capacity, very great and holy, which needs only unfolding, educating, and glorifying; and then we proclaim a bud that only calls for the air, sunshine, and rain, in order that the flower may be born.

The true statement seems to be this: every one of us needs an educator; but an educator would be of no avail if all his pupils were idiots, for he could accomplish nothing without an original capacity on which to plant the seed. We are to remember that, as we enhance the dignity of our natures, as God has given those natures to us, so do we develop, step by step, the need of a Christ. It was because of the majesty of our souls that God gave us His Son; and, had we been in nature or in character what some maintain, God would never have cared to help us, and we should have perished with the beasts.

Those who proclaim themselves "demons" are as much in the wrong as those who label themselves "saints"; and, if we were demons, salvation would be useless, and, if we were saints, it would be absurd. But if we were neither one nor the other, but half-way between the two, it would be just what we should crave, need, and must have.

"Other foundation can no man lay than Jesus Christ." One of our great scholars, whose words at times seem like mighty lyrics, they are so full of

poetry, purity, and truth, but whose course of thought in many respects would meet with our stern dissent, published a book crowded full of wisdom, entitled "Representative Men"; and in this book he speaks of Plato, Swedenborg, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Napoleon, Goethe, and he well sketches the power of each, with the great debt the world owes to them. But let us substitute any one of these great men for our *Foundation*, and how brittle our support! Plato, as a leader, might give to us grand conceptions of earth, clear ideas of truth, and suggestive facts, but he could afford no sure knowledge of heaven, and even his earth-laws had their stains; and his great admirer remarks that, in one of his books on the Republic, he throws mathematical dust in our eyes, vitiating morality somewhat by undue privileges to governors. Therefore, from this philosopher we should receive theory, without basis; abstract truth, but no girdle around it; much knowledge, but all of it swathed with conjecture and fancy, and none of it uplifted or ennobled or glorified by authority. Or, if we take Swedenborg for a guide, we shall have a mystic to help us who has dreamed beautifully of heaven, who has sounded with his brilliant imagination the abyss, who by a keen spiritual insight has dissected correspondences, who loves truth, adores wisdom, and revels in holiness; but yet, with all this advantage, we shall have no unshaken proofs of our leader's commission, and we shall see, hear, and read much that will make us doubt quite seriously the perpetuity of his teachings, while one eminent objection to him will be

that he soars above the capacities of a majority of the people, so that one must be somewhat of a scholar, thinker, and mystic, in order to understand his doctrine. Or, if we take Montaigne, Shakespeare, Napoleon, Goethe, as leaders, we shall have a sceptic, or a poet, or a man of the world, or a writer to guide us. But scepticism will only throw us into a deeper fog, engirdling us in the meshes of our own conceit ; poetry will only enchant our fancy, taking the imagination captive ; and worldly knowledge will only help us in that direction where we are already too wise ; and rhetoric will prove unsubstantial, however suggestive or brilliant it may appear, or in whatever bewitching garments it may be clothed. And all these leaders, taken together, can present no indorsement to their teachings of miracles wrought in their behalf, of lives in every respect unsullied, and of a constant, and an uninterrupted communication of the Holy Spirit.

Only one Person has been presented to the world who combines philosophy, mysticism, scepticism, poetry, worldly wisdom, and rhetorical power in his history, and who adds to all these gifts a perfect, glorified, and divine character ; and this person's philosophy measures heaven as well as earth, and eternity as well as time, and man's heart with God's great heart ; and this Person's mysticism is no deception, but really beholds what is true, uncoils all twisted strands, and reveals what cannot be changed ; and this Person's scepticism relates only to sin, with its power or its eternity, and he does not believe that anybody or anything can overthrow God ; and this Person's poetry is of such a kind

as to make nature sing, and cause all souls to leap with joy ; and this Person's worldly wisdom is such that he gives his life for the good of all, and suffers and dies for the whole world ; and this Person's rhetoric is so given forth that it can never be consumed, but keeps growing in power, beauty, and freshness, a wonder to angels as well as to men.

Yes, my Christian friends, this Person, the only Foundation, the true Support, and the glorious Basis for our lever, is Jesus Christ, the Shepherd, Bishop, and Redeemer of souls ! Glory be to his holy name !

XVII.

DEATH IMPOSSIBLE.

“Thou shalt not die.”—JUDGES vi. 23.

THERE is no such thing as death ; and the greatest mistake of our age, and of all ages, has been the very thought of the possibility of death, the admitting for a moment that anybody or anything could be destroyed, the inherent falsehood that says, He, or she, or it is dead. For, when God created the world, He shut out the possibility of decay ; and the very name of God is life, and we dethrone our God the moment we allow of extinction. Change, transition, promotion, —anything, everything, except an end ! This is the great law of Christianity ; and the word “eternity” is the logical condensation of the mighty truth.

Nature changes all the time. Nations alter and seemingly disappear. We ourselves pass on, and up ; but nobody, nothing whatever, inevitably disappears. But, oh, how hard it is for us all to learn this comfortable, uplifting, and sublime lesson ! The little boy or girl grows up to a man or a woman, and we say complainingly, We have lost our child ! No, no ! We have not lost our child. The child is there, with a fresh body and a matured soul. And

the man or woman grows into old age, and all previous life seems to be wiped out and lost. Oh, no! not wiped out, not lost, but prolonged, ripened, illustrated. We have simply the boy or girl, or man or woman, further advanced, and acting on the stage of life with a new costume; but the same actors, after all, are behind the dress. Then, again, these dear ones vanish from our sight, and we say, "They are gone, they are dead, they are no more: it is an irreparable loss." But they are not gone,—no more in the flesh, but alive with God; and they are not lost, but transplanted, glorified, crowned, and it may be right at our side after all, although unseen by mortal eyes. No more lost than was the boy or girl who became a man or woman, than was the man or woman in full vigor of life who became worn out by old age. They have only taken one step more. The old couplet has it,—

"Mortals cry, A man is dead:
Angels cry, A child is born."

One way of looking at it, it was death; but another way of looking at the matter, the Christian way, it was birth. And so, ever and forever, not destruction, but creation. We stand looking at the form of a beloved one resting in its last enclosure, and it really seems at first like death. No light in the eye, no smile upon the face, no grasp of the hand, no motion; a stillness,—oh, how still! And yet the one whom we miss did we *ever* fully comprehend? The light in the eye is gone; but was it the light in the eye we loved, or be-

hind the eye, shining through the eye, using the eye simply as a servant, a medium, and a transmitting power? No smile on the face? Yes; but was the smile *on* the face, or did the face reflect the smile? No grasp of the hand? Yes; but did the hand make the grasp, or a personality behind the hand that willed the salutation? No motion? Why, of course, no motion; for the motion was not in the body except by the order of the person that has left the body, and taken another and a better form, and given up the old form, that through its aid more life may come to the ground, trees, flowers, air, and everything. It is all life; life given to nature, and a higher life gone to God, and nothing really lost, only changed, and changed for the better evermore; and a benefaction to earth and heaven. And, in this way of looking at the matter, funeral services become salutations to heaven in behalf of the new-comers that are entering, one by one, into the City of our God; and congratulations to Nature that all the time rich donations are poured into her treasury, by which the earth is perpetually renewed, enriched, and glorified.

Nations alter and seemingly disappear; but are they really gone, or with us again in a new, better, and holier shape?

I believe that there has been a telephonic, telegraphic, and electric influence, ever since the days of Adam to the present hour, by which all past history is present life, and every nation seemingly dead is living again in Asia, Africa, Europe, and America, so that the races of to-day are but the great-grand-

children of the races of the past, and you and I have something in our bones and blood of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Judæa, Phœnicia, India, and Persia, so that nations never really die, but are changed, transmitted, reorganized, improved, by marriage, by birth, by intermingling of races, by time, by the grace of God, so that, in a certain philosophical sense, *I* am not only an American, but a Roman, a Grecian, a Persian, a part of everybody and everything that ever has been, and a part, by transmission, century after century, of everybody and everything that ever will be; and thus there is an everlasting unity of flesh, and the unity of God and the unity of humanity are great and mighty and twin realities.

Do not forget the prayer of Jesus,—that those that were his might be one with him, as he was one with God.

Once more, Nature changes all the time. Yes; but Nature never dies. Do those leaves that you tread under your feet on an October or November day perish? Are they annihilated? Is their work done, and is our farewell to them a finality? Oh, no! They will go into the hungry earth, and, through many changes, at last will fall into your hands in the shape of a luscious peach or rosy apple or juicy pear, or else as a violet or rosebud or japonica will bless your eyes, cheer your heart, and somehow spiritually say, "We do not die, we have never perished: we are blessing the world forever and ever; and, like you, O mortals, we are immortal."

I will admit, if the whole year were one long, pro-

longed winter, we could not efface from our minds the thought of decay, destruction, and death; but, when we have also spring, summer, and autumn, we at once see that there is no perishing, but a perpetual revival, change, resurrection, and glorification.

"Thou shalt not die." What do our great writers and thinkers say about death? Bryant exclaims, "Death is a deliverer." Beecher, "Dying is life." Hedge, "The death of this life will be birth into some new mode of being." Walter Scott: "Is death the last sleep? No, it is the last final awakening." Dr. Adam Clarke: "Death to a good man is but passing through a dark entry, out of one little dusky room of his Father's house into another that is fair and large, lightsome and glorious and divinely entertaining." And Goethe writes, "In the death of a good man, eternity is seen looking through time." But hear some of the words of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master: "She is not dead but sleepeth." "I am the resurrection and the life." "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Christian friends, I fear that our grasp of immortality is growing faint, through the pressure of our sorrows, through the conflicting events of time, through the specious but brilliant objections of would-be philosophers, through our great anxiety to possess proofs for a future life, that cannot, from the nature of the case, be given to mortals, on account of our un-

spiritual lives, our dead faith, our cold hearts, our bodies and our crimes, because we are taken up too much with the things of time and the pleasures of this world. I fear, I repeat, that we are letting heaven go, that we are deifying time, that we are illogically writing *mortal* upon all the creations of God, that we are not studying nature aright, nor seriously searching into the real life of nations, nor reading aright the changes among mortals; and thus, by superficial thinking, by idiotic guessing, and by a fatal delusion of the senses, we pretend to crown the grave as the end of all. But I tell you, each one, in the words that were written in the Book of Judges,—words that are confirmed by all the teachings of Christ, and words that are as true as God is true,—“Thou shalt not die.”

These thoughts seem to me to be appropriate for the first Sunday in November, a day that for ages has been set apart as “All Souls’ Sunday,” a day of commemoration for all those souls that have passed up to and are living with Almighty God. We all of us have dear ones watching us from the other side of the river; and to-day let them come at our summons, in holy troops, to receive our salutations,—invisible, but real; absent, but present; removed, but promoted; called dead on earth, called angels in heaven; loving us better than ever before, caring for us more than they ever could in the flesh, praying for us all the time, and waiting to carry our souls up to the new home, when the bell of heaven rings and our names are selected! All hail, beloved spirits,—all hail, now and forever!

XVIII.

THE FALLEN STARS.

“I saw a star fall from heaven.”—REV. ix. 1.

THE metaphorical language which we find so thickly scattered over the Bible, and with such profuseness imbedded in the Book of Revelation, cannot always be interpreted as it was meant to be understood in the day of its utterance, through a lack of accurate knowledge of the mind of the writer or speaker, or through the impossibility at this late day of our fully weighing the habits, peculiarities, and wants of those for whose welfare the figurative speech was uttered. The words were spoken for their own time; and so it is no matter if we never again get at their first flavor, or become impregnated with their original fragrance, or need the early application of their fresh, glorious, and strongest power. And yet this kind of language has a lesson for us to-day, which is quite as suggestive as any ever offered. If we give such teaching merely a local habitation, a past history, and antique robes, we abstract from its dignity, curtail its power, and rudely sever the links that bind all ages in one, while we rashly break the connection that

earth holds so beautifully, sweetly, and sacredly with heaven.

Again, if we read the Bible only as a local book, a finished revelation, and a wonderful relic of a past voice, we rob the present hour of its chief vitality, take away from the soul all its most powerful tuition, and throw a wet blanket over all the events that greet us day by day. We all want a word from God *now*; something that will feed us *to-day*; precepts, illustrations, metaphors, and doctrines that are adapted, consecrated, and applied to the special wants, earnest cravings, and the loyal anticipations of this nineteenth century. Give us no Bible that must be called dead, that must be covered only by the dust of centuries, that cannot talk now, and that has no immediate, personal, and blessed inspiration for this hour; for we do not want such a book as that, but we want something both ancient and modern,—a record and a revelation, a register and a redemption,—something that no time can shackle and no locality bind, and something equally good for Jew or Gentile, for Roman or American, for Jerusalem or Boston.

A star falling from heaven may be interpreted as something bright that leaps from its proper place, or may be used as the symbol of many things that are out of their true position, and as the type of many persons who are wandering, or who have wandered, or who will wander from their proper locality. It stands for broken plans, broken character, for virtue turned upside down, and for a world filled with riot, confusion, and shame. We hear of some one who has fallen from the path

of right, one who is the last we should have suspected ; and we feel as if the heavens were not quite so secure, for a brilliant star is tarnished. We almost doubt our own souls, and we say, Who now is safe? Is not everything going to ruin? Are there such things as virtue, justice, honor, and holiness?

One who lives long upon the earth, however, soon learns to keep calm, steady, and unmoved, whatever may happen, clearly understanding that the timbers of morality, however much they may be shaken, torn, and abused, will never wholly give way. These troubles that startle us so much, no matter how great, are but ripples on the sea of time, spray upon the ocean of eternity, and a gleam of darkness upon the ever-shining sun; and they only leave a little cloud behind them that is soon lost in the cordial embrace of approaching waves of light.

As we study history, we find, in each age, a large number of prominent men who for a long season gave a brilliant light, and then all at once became eclipsed by their sins, being struck from the celestial skies,—a Nero, Bacon, Arnold, and thousands of others who once stood fair, bright, and beautiful, but who now have become stained, shamed, and ruined. Is there any sight more sad than this? It is opportunity clipped, virtue smothered, consummate grandeur scorched, and a posterity robbed of examples that might have been splendidly luminous beyond all human estimate. Such men have struck a blow at humanity, and they stand unenvied, in the niche of fame, as traitors to their race, aliens from God, and bad specimens of a discrowned

mortality ; and such is the penalty of a high position misused, of a great trust betrayed, and of a grand possibility disgraced.

Again, great cities and countries that have become extinct are fallen stars,—Babylon, Nineveh, and Tyre, and others of like nature, which once led the world in beauty, culture, commerce, and force, but which now are lost in the ashes that serve as their mausoleum. No one could have foreseen their fate, because so stately, so magnificent, and so glorious did they appear, and right royal in their beauty ; and he would have been accounted a mad man who dared then to hint of decay, while, without doubt, his punishment would have been torture and death. For how could such wealth of scenery, such luxury of art, such profuseness of coin, and such rare acquisitions ever perish ? There those ancient powers stood, glittering, flashing, buoyant, defiant, and moving in triumphant career ; and the people see no danger, own no subjection, and claim imperishable power, imperial sway. And yet they will soon be cut off in their course, quickly slip from their gravity, and ere long will be covered in oblivion, while all that we can say concerning them will be, Fallen, fallen ! and the places that have known them shall know them no more forever, and strangers shall stand over their wrecks, telling the story of their greatness previous to their terrible decay.

In each one's personal history, we discover that bright luminaries have fallen from their place ; for no one can look back upon a past life without detecting various periods when awful slips were made. How in-

nocent we once were! What bright dreams of goodness flitted athwart the brain, crowned the soul, and illuminated a possible future! How we loved to climb into heaven by vision, sweeping with the eyes of faith through all the splendid scenery there! How all our plans were for virtue, our promises for heaven, and all our resolutions were tinged, bathed, and scented with the glories of celestial holiness! Ah! "the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak." We meant to do that which was right, but temptation came, then we turned aside to the evil way; and probably there is not a person in the world at the age of twenty-one who has not lost somewhat of the freshness of early life, and we all moan over some good thing that we have too easily let go. Are we as truthful as we once were? We all know how straightforward children are, and how even roughly sometimes they speak, that they may not evade truth; but even allowing that we have more prudence, and that we know when to keep silent, have we not trespassed considerably into the domain of falsehood, and have we not designedly and adroitly made the worse appear the better? Are we honest in our dealings as we once were? and is the golden rule now strictly obeyed, "Do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you"? We once thought that prices should be the same for the ignorant man as they were for the shrewd customer, that the quality of our goods should be exactly as described, that the quantity delivered should be the same as ordered and the same as charged. Do we think that this is best now?

Again, are we as pure as we once were? Is our

life as chaste as we dreamed it would be, when, in youthful days, we gazed into the dim future? Let us weigh our deeds now, side by side with our convictions then,—do they balance? Ah! the firmament of our souls has become strangely darkened, and many of the brilliant lights that once studded it appear to have died out. Only here and there twinkles one little star, very lonely, very sad, and very obscure. Clouds and darkness are round about us, while a thick vapor has thrown its fearful shroud over our original beauty.

Yet, my friends, all this we can remedy; and these choice constellations of early days, now so disguised, can be made to shine with renewed glory, can once more proclaim their power, and can yet again blaze with gorgeous splendor. And Jesus came on purpose to tell us how to keep these starlike virtues in their orbit, how to call them back when they have wandered, and how to summon up their original splendor. He did not wish us to be freed from all temptation, that, merely by the absence of exposure, our innocence might be eternally fortified, and that all our goodness might be iron-clad,—no, not that; but he endeavored to show us how to meet temptation, how to conquer it, how to take our innocence and to push it into virtue, and how to change a mere passive goodness into a decided, active, and glorious nobleness of character.

Those who do well simply because they never have had the opportunity to do ill cannot yet be labelled as anything else but babes, and must be treated as those who have never emerged from their spiritual infancy. Christ came to teach us how to keep in our orbit, not

as did Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise before the fall, but how to keep straight under the booming shot of temptation, under the rattling of the whole artillery of Satan, and under every danger whatsoever.

More than this also, thanks be to Almighty God, much more than this, Christ came to teach us,—how to get back to our true position when we had wandered from the right, how to conquer our slips so that they should not perpetually retard our progress, and how to stand up even after we had fallen terribly down. This is what I love to consider: this truth sends radiant hues over all my thoughts; and this cheering fact bathes my whole future with a magnificence not to be described, that Jesus would not let me stay a lost star, unless my obstinate will should be determined to resist his gracious help, and should basely prefer to play the traitor all the time. He did not wish us to stay out in the cold; and he laid all his plans, consecrated all his efforts, and gave his whole life, that he might win us to life, light, and peace. But how,—there is the great question,—how? He gave us attractive pictures of God, our Maker, then offered sketches of heaven so brilliant in suggestiveness that the heart almost longs for its release as it examines them; and then he depicted the evil effects of sin on each one's soul and life, with the sure retributions that were to follow in its wake, both on earth and in the Celestial Land. Then, also, best argument of all, he gave us his life and death, pleading with us most eloquently by this holy exhibition of a sublime self-sacrifice.

By these, and by other very beautiful, potent, and

splendid ways, he sought to lift us back again to our true position, to restore us to our royalty, and to re-create our souls. "I saw a star fall from heaven." Some of you may ask, Why should God permit this star to fall? Could not He who made the heavens have kept the constellations in their place, and have saved from extinction those brilliant lights? If He could only make them, but could never control them after they were born, where was His omnipotence? If He could only make them, and yet not know that they would rebel, where was His omniscience? Or, in other words, why did God ever allow sin to attack the children of men?—that old question that is ever new, and that will ever come up to trouble us; for it has puzzled the human heart ever since the human heart was made, yet is not the answer really very plain? Without free will, we should be machines; but with it there must be the possibility of our going astray. God can and does prevent sin from injuring the world ultimately; but He cannot, consistently with the freedom of the human mind, stop a human being from going astray, if that human being so desires. And if the star will fall from heaven, why it must fall; but God will prevent it from scorching the world, while God perhaps, in time, will so inflame it with His blessed love, pity, and grace that it will find again its place, regain its power, and shine once more in splendor. The very fact that we can be sinners proves the opposite truth, that we are able to be saints; and so, too, we are all the better saints because we have stood over the abyss, have scented its tainted air, and have become a little dizzy by looking

down, provided that we have only held fast our integrity, have always remembered our prayers, and have held tightly the outstretched hand of the Almighty. Our Master was tempted in all points like as we are, and yet without sin.

I am not one of those who think that God made a mistake when He created us. I confess I do not know of any improvement that I can suggest. I should not dare to stand questioning the Infinite, I should be afraid to knock at heaven's door with loud complaints, and should say to myself, Who art thou, O clay, that would say to the Potter, What doest Thou? Did not the holy writer state a truth, beyond all doubt, when he exclaimed, "We are made but little lower than the angels, and are clothed with glory and honor"? Perhaps, when we were children, we said, or it may be now, in our childish moods, we say, Oh that we had been made angels! Made angels? Why, then, half of our joys would be cut off, and all the beauty of contrast we should lose; for light is not half so light without its opposite, shadow.

My friends, it is a great thing that we enter the world first mortal, for then immortality becomes worth something; and it is a great thing that we are not tied to our orbits, and that we can swing off, if we are so foolish as to try. And this life of ours is sublime.

"I saw a star fall from heaven." We should hardly be true to our souls, did we not consecrate these thoughts with a personal application. Are any of us lost stars, and do we feel to-day that we are struck off from the firmament of God's love? Have our hopes

of heaven departed, and is our view of life most dark? Let us not despair, and let us not sink deeper and deeper earthward; for there is yet hope, and a mighty hope, that a loving Father, if we earnestly wish it, will again kindle the mouldering ashes in our souls. There is hope that once more we shall be stirred up to fresh warmth, to beautiful brightness, and to a renewed life; and there is hope, if we yearn for goodness, that the loving Jesus will take our hands in regal sympathy, while he will so press them that the stagnant blood will be quickened, the deadened pulse revived, and the stony heart re-created. And there is a certainty, if the aching soul longs for peace, that the Holy Spirit will come with the sound of a rushing wind from heaven, and with Pentecostal tongues of flame, driving away and burning off all false ways, all wicked thoughts, and everything weak and doubtful about us. Lost stars, if any such read these words, if you are penitent, there is hope that you may be found,—found, too, reilluminated, reinstated, and being permitted evermore to shine with a lustre that is past poor human speech to set forth.

Nature works faithfully, shines all the time, as if to make up for the deficiency of man, and sends, on special occasions, extra lights for our comfort, joy, and wonder. Sometimes a comet goes rushing through the sky with a glory, splendor, and beauty which no words of ours can set forth. Sometimes auroral lights set a part of the heavens in a glorious blaze, giving us a foretaste of the radiance of the Celestial City; and sometimes, too, at longer intervals between the generations of men, are granted us meteoric showers and heavenly

fireworks, as if the angels were playing with rockets, or were throwing their fire-balls into the air, to show us how miserable are the pyrotechnics of earth when measured by the science and the skill of the inhabitants of the higher kingdom. They seem to toss stars up there in the skies in sport, throwing embryo worlds into the air, and setting the whole firmament in commotion; while we, poor tenants of the flesh, can only stand spell-bound, doubting, it may be, whether some of the sparks at such times may not coquet with our homes and take away our lives. Nature works grandly, nobly, and fearfully; and may these celestial illuminations, whenever they come and wherever they appear, in the twinkling of stars or in the flashes of lightning, or in any lurid shape, be nothing to be compared with the pyrotechnic displays of goodness in our own souls. Oh, let there be in the inward citadel balls of generous fire rapidly shooting toward needy hearts, and there let the horizon be one blaze of goodness and a perfect meteoric shower of holy thoughts and noble deeds, so that celestial spirits gazing at us shall be wrapped in wonder, awe, and admiration; and let not this show, like its earthly type, make but random visits, but let it become an established glory in our experience as long as the heavens and the earth endure.

So God grant it may be with all His children; and let us all go into the world, and preach the "gospel of peace" by heart, lip, and hand.

XIX.

THE RENEWING SPIRIT.

“A new spirit within you.” — EZEK. xi. 19.

GOD'S words to Ezekiel grandly pointed to an hour of which perhaps that prophet had no very clear idea, a time when a new light was to fall upon the world ; for one of the blessed gifts to the earth, that always yields tokens of its grandeur, and cannot fail of its beautiful echo throughout time and eternity, was made when Christ came into the world, for, by his coming, a fresh spirit of power, love, and beauty entered into all hearts, and was ready to remain as an abiding guest, if greeted with a holy welcome. If we were to examine all the renewals that were brought about by Christianity, eternity would be too short for a perfect revelation. So let us now look only at man's opinion of himself, at his judgment of events, glad or sad, at his measurement of woman, at his own change from darkness into marvellous light, and at his dreams about the end of life ; for, on all these points, I claim that there has been a tremendous change, a new spirit, and a complete revolution, when we compare the times before Christianity and the days ever since. When we strike out the certainty of immortality, when we erase the

goodness of God, when we deny the sanctity of the soul, when we impeach the possible grandeur of human nature, when we question the triumphs of virtue, and everything spiritual about us that is full of prophecy, inspiration, and splendid hope, and when we place ourselves simply on a level with the brute creation as beings limited to time, engirdled by chance, the sport of fate, and mortgaged to decay, why, then we get a logical view of a benighted heathen mind, where the best dreams are only a solemn, mournful, terrible, and pungent perhaps.

Not long ago, I read for a second time, with a great deal of admiration, with a vast amount of surprise, and with considerable gratitude, some of the sayings of Marcus Antoninus, who was born in Rome in the year 121, and became Emperor of Rome when he was forty years old; and yet this great philosopher, this wonderful man, this splendid seer, this courageous moralist, this high-minded, clear-spirited, noble-hearted, and truly great philanthropist every little while gives a sly intimation of his doubts, exhibits an undertone of uncertainty, and fumbles along in the dark, as he thinks, speaks, and acts. Once he thus cries out: "Of human life the time is a point, and the substance is in a flux, and the perception is dull, and the composition of the whole body subject to putrefaction, and the soul a whirl, and fortune hard to divine, and fame a thing devoid of judgment. And, to say all in a word, everything which belongs to the body is a stream, and what belongs to the soul is a dream and vapor, and life is a warfare and a stranger's sojourn, and after fame is oblivion." Now,

this man, although born after Christ only a few years, mentions the Christians only once, and then speaks of them as a deluded sort of people, and was so far away from any contact with the new believers as never probably to have given their system any deep, hearty, and honest study, so that he represents the highest type of a man without the new spirit.

But look, by way of contrast, at some of the utterances of those who have been bathed in the Christian spirit. Giles exclaims, "Whenever I contemplate man in the actual world or the ideal, I am lost amidst the infinite multiformity of his life, but always end in wonder at the essential unity of his nature." And Chapin eloquently remarks: "Man was sent into the world to be a growing and exhaustless force. The world was spread out around him to be seized and conquered. Realms of infinite truth burst open above him, inviting him to tread those shining coasts along which Newton dropped his plummet, and Herschel sailed a Columbus of the skies." And Bulwer Lytton, "What is human is immortal." But do we speak of man's opinion of himself as it is to-day? Well, can we better reach the solution of that question than by a personal appeal to our own souls in their best moments? Let each one say come, Come, come, my soul, and tell me, as before God and these witnesses, what is thy judgment concerning thy privileges, thy rights, and thy providential appointments? Is not the reply, I am made by God, I am capable of constant joy, I am ordained for an eternal life, and I am surrounded, engirdled, and sanctified continually by an appointed

troop of angels ; my possibilities are unlimited, and my career, if I so will it, can be one splendid, holy, and grand triumph, and never can my identity be lost, nor become befogged, nor be questioned, and so God has ordered concerning all souls ?

Look then, friends, at the contrast. Once, life was with all a perpetual uncertainty, a terrible darkness, a thin vapor, a mere chance, a decided materialism, apparently a grand haphazard and a mammoth mistake ; but now it is sacred design, holy forethought, blessed assurance, grand development, glorious perpetuity, massive grandeur, and eternal gain,— that is as God orders it, and as we, by God's grace, can make it.

Next look at the judgment of events with or without the great spirit and light and glory of the Master. Of course, in the times before our Lord, everything seemed to go by luck, or by favoritism of unknown deities, and all things moved along often without a guide and devoid of a purpose, so that incantation, superstition, sacrificial offerings, and all sorts of bribes were common, in order that the Fates might be propitiated and ill fortune dismissed. You see, in the old tragedies, that one of the main features of the plays is the entrance of the avenging Furies, and oftentimes these Furies seem to have no good reason for their spite and their madness ; and they try to overwhelm in ruin multitudes of innocent persons, under the sweeping denunciation of the destiny of the house or tribe.

Now, all this goes to prove that the untaught mind was afloat all the time in its judgment of events, so that every day's items were but tangled skeins that no

mortal hands could possibly set right. But to-day, what? Now everything falls into the groove of God's will. Now nothing can fall out of His correcting and transforming hand. Now all the webs have angel fingers, that are able to manage them and to set them straight, and every tangled thread is fastened to the throne of God, so that even the discordant notes of the great organ of life are set to the right music, and all the jars, in the end, perpetuate the glory of God; and there can be no darkness without the revealing light of an eternal purpose of order, right, and righteousness. So, to-day, the believer can say, Whatever happens, God is there, God is love, God knows best, and He will in His own time straighten out all perplexity, smooth out all roughness, level all mountains, bridge all chasms, and sanctify everything somehow to the working out of his blessed will.

Once more, all things are made right by the spirit of Jesus in regard to the position, the capabilities, and the destiny of woman. Ah! sad was the state of the gentle sex till the shackles were broken by that new power in Palestine. Once, she was only a slave, a beast of burden and an outcast, with no will of her own, with no mind to be revered, no position and no rights, subject to all abuse and insult, scourged without mercy for the least offence of look or word, and covered with privations, cruelties, and dishonor. But, sisters in Christ, where are you now, and where will you be when we better learn your lofty nature, your grand possibilities, and are more firmly penetrated by your power for goodness? To-day the equal of man and more frequently

his superior, with mind sweeping all the corners of knowledge,—clear, sweet, and beautiful,—with a heart full of beaming peace, purity, and holiness, making known your true force, as servants of God, in the varied relations of daughter, sister, wife, and mother, and walking into all places of power, honor, culture, and responsibility, with a success that can never be questioned. God be thanked that you are allowed to lift us poor men into the light, to show us the way of goodness, and to give us bright examples of courage, truthfulness, fidelity, honor, and holiness! God be thanked for the true woman, for she stands constantly at the gate of heaven.

Look then next at the man or the woman who, by the aid of the “new spirit,” has leaped out of great darkness into marvellous light, old habits given up, old sins despised, old desires crushed, wicked companions let alone,—remorse, restoration, resolution, revolution, new birth, a new creature. Oh, what a change! The eye, before so dull, is lighted up with the light of the Lord; the face, before so flushed, now clean, fresh, healthy, and radiant; the voice, once husky, thick, terribly disguised and trembling, now clear, bright, crisp, and pure; the step, shaking with a forced decrepitude, now elastic, firm, proud,—the whole manner changed, a genial heart, a consecrated soul, a glorified life, and all old things put away. All these words will faintly describe the sinner turned into a saint, the prodigal running back to his father, the man of the world becoming a man of God, a disciple of Jesus, and crowned by the Spirit.

So, also, to-day our faith in the unending life is renewed by the power, grandeur, and beauty of the gospel. There was nothing sure concerning immortality till Jesus came. The heathen sometimes dreamed it, the Jew continually longed for it; but Christianity alone fulfilled it, brought immortality to light, and made it sure and grand and beautiful. Jesus said right out, "I am the resurrection and the life"; for he was determined there should be no doubt upon that point among those who believed in him. But what did they say before Jesus came?—Would that another life might be! Will our darlings live again? O God, give us back at some time these beloved ones? Yes, such were the thoughts and the words of those who knew no other world, but craved it, wept for it, and agonized over it.

But just hear to-day a few words of those who now know that they shall live again. Jeremy Taylor, that good old saint of the English Church, says, "I have often thought of death, and I find it the least of all evils." Franklin, the stern moralist, exclaims: "I look upon death to be as necessary to our constitution as sleep. We shall rise refreshed in the morning." Bailey, the author of "Festus," cries out: "Death, thou art infinite. It is life that is little." Beecher desires to have his body covered with flowers and his home filled with light. And Lowell, the poet, the ambassador, the scholar, writes, "Life is the jailer, death the angel sent to draw the unwilling bolts, and set us free." But enough of extract, although I do like occasionally to hear good people speak, and those of different times.

and varied culture, when they strike their music on one string; for all the sound is in harmony, although the touch may sometimes vary.

“A new spirit within you.” Ezekiel’s words are well prophetic of the constant power of the Master. Ah, in sorrow, how Christ especially gives the new spirit to all those who cry out for the comforting bestowal! A mother loses her child, so the old legend has it, and little May, lost on earth, but living with God, beholding her mother weeping, has the gates of heaven set ajar, so that the mourner can peer right through and see her daughter; and thus it is described:—

“‘Twas whispered one morning in heaven
How the little child-angel May,
In the shade of the great, white portal,
Sat sorrowing night and day;
How she said to the stately warden,—
He of the key and bar,—
‘O angel, sweet angel, I pray you,
Set the beautiful gates ajar,—
Only a little, I pray you,
Set the beautiful gates ajar.’

“‘I can hear my mother weeping,—
She is lonely, she cannot see
A glimmer of light in the darkness,
Where the gates shut after me.
Oh, turn me the key, sweet angel,
The splendor will shine so far.’
But the warden answered, ‘I dare not
Set the beautiful gates ajar.’

“Then rose up Mary, the blessed,
Sweet Mary, Mother of Christ,
Her hand on the hand of the angel
She laid, and her touch sufficed.

Turned was the key in the portal,
Fell ringing the golden bar,
And, lo ! in the little child's fingers
Stood the beautiful gates ajar.

“‘And this key, for further using,
To my blessed Son shall be given,’
Said Mary, Mother of Jesus,
Tenderest heart in heaven.
Now never a sad-eyed mother
But may catch the glory afar,
Since safe in the Lord Christ's bosom
Are the keys of the gates ajar.”

So sweetly does this Italian hymn show us how Christ helps aching hearts, and how by trusting souls we get a glimpse of heaven, through the gates ajar.

“The new spirit.” Yes, dear friends, at all times do we especially need a new spirit. A fresh chance is offered continually for our promises of better service, and added hopes arise of a more blessed future that shall be found in our history, golden and beautiful, and richer faith is pressed upon us, as we march through the labyrinth of time, not knowing the end. And, lo ! Jesus is with us to take away our fear, to increase our courage, to make holy our steps, to sanctify our souls, and to give us a new spirit. Glory be to God !

THE BURYING OF THE TALENT.

"I was afraid, and . . . hid thy talent in the earth." — MATT. xxv. 25.

EVERY one that enters the world is ordained from the very start to be great, good, useful, holy, God's child, the disciple of Jesus, and an heir of heaven; and so every infant is a bundle of magnificent possibilities. I do not ask whether you begin life, mentally or spiritually, with one or with ten talents, for that is of no concern; for you are born to do a mighty work, whatever your capacity, so that, if you develop your full powers, you will have no cause to be ashamed. The great question that will be asked in eternity will be, not how much of a hero or a heroine each soul has become, but, Is each soul complete, according to its power? So God compares the performance with the ability, and looks not at the shining gifts; for He simply asks about the vigor with which we have consecrated our native powers, wants to know about the wealth of our efforts, and desires to weigh the grandeur, dignity, sweetness, and beauty that have glorified our self-discipline. We can all become distinguished if we so desire, for God has opened the path of greatness to

every child that He has made ; and the weakest brother or sister by nature may become by grace the very leader of us all, for all things are easy to the heart that is wide open to God, Christ, and duty.

Why is it, then, that so many fail to become what they ought to be ? What is it that chokes the preordained fruitfulness ? Why do we go right in the opposite direction from the paths that are so clearly marked out ? Why do we hide our talent in the earth ? I suppose, first of all, that we are not fully conscious of our celestial prerogatives. We are educated wrongly at the very commencement of our lives. We are perhaps taught to look upon ourselves more as intruders, or failures, or slaves, than as conquerors, kings, queens, and possible saints. We are told all the time that we must not do rather than about those things that God meant that we should do. Existence opens upon us blocked with restrictions rather than as paved with glories. So we grow up belittled ; and it is hard work for us to tear off the bandages of habit, of fear and restraint.

Then, again, temporal matters are so pressing, exhausting, and comprehensive that we insensibly become hedged in and swamped by the mere foam, tinsel, and outside show of life ; and thus duty gets pushed away by inclination, pleasure obtains the master-hand over principle, and goodness also seems not only hard to obtain, but difficult to manage when possessed. We look upon duty as well enough, perhaps, but as irksome, gloomy, ill-timed, and as a sort of skeleton in the round of our daily performance. We do not care to be tied

down to the imperious demands of right, not being clear in head enough to know that it is by the aid of right alone that we can obtain any real peace, happiness, and strength, and not understanding that the very worst kind of slavery is the slavery of sin.

We have seen the difficulty : now what is the cure, and what will lead us to a complete change of character ? Call the change what you please,—conversion, growth, new birth, culture, self-direction, or everlasting consecration,—what will hasten or establish one or all ?

At first, all the children of God stand as perfect dwarfs in character, rude specimens of men and women, and undeveloped ; and how can they ever get out of this terrible, unfinished, and one-sided condition ?

The first author of the good change in our characters is Almighty God ; and all theologies are false that leave this great truth out of sight, every creed is corrupt that denies the fact. No man can personally lift himself to a higher position ; and that logic is weak, that preaching in vain, that opinion useless and sad, that, when speaking of the glory of manhood or the loveliness of womanhood, or the beauty of childhood, forgets all about the omnipotence of God ! Strange that we should speak of what man can do, when we know very well that he can do nothing without permission. The first desire or the leading impulse to a better life is planted in every human breast by the Almighty ; and every one has this celestial telegraph built up between the soul and heaven.

There are many ways by which the Infinite holds communication with us ; and each peculiar disposition

is besieged as such disposition especially needs. This beautiful world in which we live is charged with messages from above ; and, if we will only keep open eyes and open ears, we shall find a voice in every breath of wind, in every wave of light, and in all the changing wonders of nature. But most clearly comes the quickening, the preventing, and the illuminating grace, through the solemn grandeurs, the joyous splendors, and the august glories of Revelation ; for there we find hints, prophecies, truths, and salutations that are sufficient to alarm the conscience, stir the will, brace the imagination, and consecrate the heart. God, then, being the first help toward our better spiritual condition, the second help is man himself. We have something to do about it, we have a great deal more to do with the work than we are apt to think ; and those that say that man has nothing to do about his conversion make just as wrong a statement as those who say he can do it all. And, if we hide our talent, bury it, and give it back just as we have received it, we shall be greeted with a merited rebuke. We must put our talent out to interest, we must increase its size, and we shall have to answer for its improvement ; for we are only trustees over property not our own. Call upon God and Christ as loudly as we will, and invoke the whole army of the saints, we shall receive no aid, if we sit still, if we fold our hands, if we go to sleep ; and sluggards will not find their names written down in the "Lamb's Book of Life." We must be wide-awake ourselves ; and our prayers and labors must be joined, must affectionately clasp hands, and must always be in

cordial sympathy. If we really want to grow better, we must ask God to make us so; and then, right away, in the twinkling of an eye, without the pause of a second, we must try, with all our might, to so conform to God's will that there shall be no question concerning our thorough sincerity. As one has said, we must work as if we could do it all, and we must pray as if we could do nothing! Every one of us, however good we may be, might be better; all are hiding continually some talent; and everybody is out of joint in some part of the character.

We do not get sufficiently acquainted with our own hearts, we leave the formation of our characters too much to the wind and the tide, and we forget how everything, however trivial to us, goes toward the ennobling or the debasing of our souls. Supposing Washington had followed out the bent of his will, and had gone as midshipman in the English service instead of returning to his mother that he might save her heart from breaking, what a difference it would have made, not only in his own biography, but in the history of the world! Supposing Webster had accepted a clerkship in a court, at the small salary that was offered, instead of running the greater risk of braving the world, what a change would have swept through his whole existence, and how many of the records of our national history would have to be blotted out! What would the apostle Paul ever have done for himself or for the world, if he had not listened to the higher call that greeted him on his way to Damascus?

Ah! we have a great deal to do in the making of our

characters through the way in which we handle events as they daily and hourly greet us. Friends, we are surrounded continually by calls to do better; and, if we refuse to obey, let us not labor under the miserable delusion that we can hide our talents. Would to God that we were able to do even this, and thus to smother a deadly influence! But we cannot hide them; and, if we do not make them work for us, they will work against us, for they must be either friends or enemies. They refuse to be neutral; and they say emphatically to us, We will do you good or we will do you harm, just as you please? And they are something like that manna that dropped from the heavens for the nourishment of the wandering Israelites; for that manna had to be appropriated at once, or else it was changed from food into poison, and from a sweet savor into an offence. So with these talents,—if unappropriated, their nature becomes changed.

The servant thought that he had buried his talent; but he made a great mistake, poor fellow, for that talent had buried him, and he was covered all over with the rubbish of his neglect, the dust of his laziness, and the disgrace of his sin, and he was so benumbed that he was unaware that he was lost in a hideous pit. Let us remember that we can never stand still; for we must move forward or backward, we must grow better or worse, and we are nearer to God or nearer to evil with every breath that we take.

As we feel, then, how insecure all our lives are, and how full of responsibility each hour of our being, we are just in the condition to understand, receive, appre-

ciate, and rejoice in the claims, comforts, promises, and glories of the Christian Church ; for solitary would be our campaign without a leader, sad the conflict without a guide, and sure the defeat were no orders given, no pledges offered, and no weapons of defence furnished. Who, then, shall we choose for a commander, and into what company shall we enlist as privates, and what is it best for us to do ?

If we look around among our fellow-men, we do not seem to get what we want ; for they are all likewise in the dark, are all equally encompassed with difficulties and pains, are all privates like ourselves, and are looking for some one to take them by the hand and lead them on to victory. What, then, is to be done ? Why, the way is clear, walk in it ; the door is opened, enter ; the Shepherd is at hand, notice him. Christ is all ready to lead us into the paths of righteousness, and is waiting simply for our willing service ; for he has been all over the ground himself, and knows just what to do, is thoroughly acquainted with our characters, is aware of just what we need, has seen the home that is finally to be ours, understands how to prepare us for it, and has never failed in any contest that he has undertaken. And what better champion than that could any of us select ? All that Jesus asks of us is to feel our need of him ; and our very state of abject want should powerfully stir up within our souls a sense of this mighty need. Look at his character and see what a perfect chant it was. All the notes in tune, and every note makes such beautiful music that even angels stoop to listen, and Almighty God Himself has

signified His delight. Look at his precepts, that are so abundant, pure, precious, fragrant, and everlasting; and so everlastingly applicable to nature, inciting, exciting, comforting, consecrating, and redeeming all obedient souls. And how they engirdle, if rightly received, every experience with a benediction, and all eternity with a halo of glory! Look at his sufferings,—how nobly met, how wisely transfigured, and how wonderfully suggestive! Truly, we are safe with such a Commander; and he will lead us, without doubt, if we are faithful disciples, into the regions of the blest.

“I was afraid, and hid thy talent in the earth.” I am very sorry that fear has had so much to do with all the religions of the world, and I cannot think that any worship is a healthy worship which is born out of dread; for, if we serve only under compulsion, our service is indeed barren, juiceless, and hard. A cringing child is a most pitiable sight; and, if so to human eyes, how much more so must it be in the eyes of the Eternal One! It appears to me that the more we get of Christ’s spirit, the more will the spirit of fear melt into the spirit of trust; for we know that perfect trust will cast out all fear. We must love God so well that we shall do as he bids joyfully; and then will our existence be robed in splendor, the future will be clothed in a garb of diamond brightness, and our whole time will be taken up in trying to do something that shall please Heaven. Dear friends, am I anticipating too much? and are we yet so low down in the scale of humanity that we must be driven, and not won? And can we understand nothing but blows? I will not do any one

that great discredit, for I know better ; and I feel that we all want to lean upon God's heart, want to press His hand, want to feel that we are His beloved children, long for His tender, beautiful, and comforting acceptance, and crave His joyous consecration, hoping at some time to become jewels in His crown. What, then, is to hinder us from being all that we wish ? For everything is ready, we are invited, the table is spread, the guests are gathering, all things look gorgeously attractive ; and why shall we not go to the festival ? Oh, may God grant that no seat may be vacant at the great spiritual feast of Himself and His Son !

But let us come down to plainer terms. We must use our talents, and all of them, in the best way, and consecrate them to the highest purposes, and make them pay compound interest ; and then, when the day of reckoning shall come, we shall have an account to give of our stewardship, that will make all the bells of heaven ring with joy. So may it be, Almighty God !

XXI.

GOD A SPIRIT.

“God is a Spirit.”—JOHN iv. 24.

IN all ages there have been different conceptions of God, and in each age no two persons have thought alike about Him ; and this is true, whether the idea of the Supreme be merely a figment of the brain or a direct revelation from on high. For a revelation from above does not always greet the same capacity, and must become moulded, tinged, and strengthened or weakened, according to the state of mind and tone of heart to which it is addressed and in which it takes up its abode.

No two human beings can grasp the same truth alike for all see varying sides of it, and the sides, too, that are most adapted to prearranged ideas, settled feelings, and rooted prejudices ; and so it is not in the least strange that our theologies differ, for it would be very strange if they did not differ, and it is now very singular that they agree so well. And yet, when we place all the myriad conceptions concerning the Father together and make a mosaic of them, we shall be surprised to see how well they coincide, and what a beautiful, sublime, holy, and comforting picture they surely make.

God has been called Power, Wisdom, Love, Fate, and Nature, according as the heart has trembled under a sense of nothingness, or has reeled under the weight of its ignorance, or has ached through the crushing sensation of loneliness, or has been tossed on unexplored seas, or has been lost in vague wonder at the uniformity of inflexible laws. The disciples who see God as manifested in either of these ways, at first sight, seem to be widely apart in thought and feeling, are often rude antagonists, certainly govern their lives from different motives, and have standards of judgment and action entirely at variance with their oponents ; and yet, really, these disciples of the varied schools are not so widely apart from the truth in their definitions as they seem, or else they could never survive as a party. God blends in His character, purposes, designs, government, and in His daily and eternal administration, all the names, all the parties, and all the definitions in one.

God is power. Who doubts this fact, as he notices the swing of the world, the play of the planets, and the conflicting elements? and who doubts it, as he hears of tornadoes, earthquakes, and volcanoes, terrific storms, and all the convulsions of the earth? And must we not all believe it, as we see the vast procession of the dead in a solid phalanx, each hour, mount upward?

God is wisdom. Who doubts it, as he scans the mechanism of a leaf and dissects the composition of a star? Do you not believe it, as you gaze at a tribe of ants, busy at their work, or at a swarm of bees around their hive, or at a troop of insects forming their coral island in the sea? Or must we not all confess the fact,

as we turn from these outside scenes of wondrous mechanism to a survey of our own frames, contemplating the keen knowledge that must have created them so wonderfully and so grandly ?

God is love. Who doubts it, that ever tries to count the mercies that surround each created being, the glories that bathe the sight of us all, and the thousand and the ten thousand possibilities of joy that hover around those who tabernacle the flesh ?

God is fate. That is, He is the ordainer of our fate ; and who can question this, when the impotency of humanity is so glaring, and when all merely human efforts seem so empty and vain ?

God is nature. That is, He is in nature, pervades it, glorifies it, fills it with benedictions, charges it with lessons, surrounds it with angelic powers, and makes it the administrator of His blessed will.

Let us mention here the humanitarian view of God, which has prevailed more or less throughout all the centuries, and of which glimpses are seen in Genesis, where the Lord God is described as walking among the trees,—a view that art has somewhat encouraged, and which perhaps, faintly or firmly, takes possession of all minds at some seasons of thinking. The heathen get over being troubled by this human want by making a God of stone or of wood, that they can see with their eyes ; and so the Christian satisfies the deep yearning for a material God by seeing in Jesus Christ a perfect image of the Father. All created beings want, not only a God invisible, but visible,—visible, too, not only through the working of attributes, but as a distinct

Being in whom all these attributes can gloriously coalesce. If the Bible be true, we have every reason to believe that God has some kind of a form. Our text says, "God is a Spirit"; but it does not say He is an unclothed spirit, it does not deny His separate Being, and it does not assert a number of powers and affections, but no personality. But it leaves the whole matter, where it should be left, wholly unexplained.

God is a spirit. So are we all spirits, but we are spirits covered by flesh; and these bodies are not ourselves, but they are simply our clothing, while death is only the disrobing of the spirit from its fleshly garments, the spirit form being left all untouched, the "us" being uninjured, and there being simply a release from a prison house of clay, but still a glorified spiritual body safe with God.

As we understand very well that it is not our flesh that thinks, talks, and acts, but the spirit that does all these things, the spirit underneath the earthly body and controlling it, so does it become easier for us to comprehend God as a spirit, and, in fact, we cannot well, for any length of time, contemplate God in any other way; for, if we clothed him, like ourselves, in garments of clay, we should at once fear that he might be subjected to limitations like ourselves, especially as we know that Jesus Christ, when in the earthly body, was bound to its laws and subject to its exposures. But some may say that we are discussing about a subject concerning which no definite information can be obtained, and of which we can only learn a little while we remain on the earth, while that little rests under

a cloud; and men may say that on this account it is better to let the whole question concerning God's nature alone, waiting until it is revealed to each one after death. And men may think that it is enough for us to know that there is a God, while any further knowledge is purposely kept back, so that, if we try to pull aside the veil, we shall be involved in trouble and covered with dismay.

To a certain extent, these objections border upon the truth; for it is not well for us to be too curious. It will not do for us, in the insolence of our would-be wisdom, to invade the sanctities of God's mysteries; and in many things it becomes us to be reverently silent, for we must put a firm check upon the myriad dreams of the brain. And yet there are a great many things which we are asked to search out, and of which, in accordance with the thoroughness of our seeking, is promised the explanation, and a knowledge of which is needed and must be secured for the right upbuilding of our religious lives. I maintain that a modest inquiry into the name and nature of God is one of those things required of every created being; and the human race once so misunderstood the Maker of heaven and earth that Jesus came to earth especially to reveal Him. As we examine the Gospels, we shall see different definitions given to the Eternal One, so that by all minds some idea concerning him might be gained. Phrases like these constantly occur: "There is none good but One, that is God"; "There is one God, and no other"; "Not one is forgotten before God"; "God is true"; "living God"; "With God all things are

possible"; "my God and your God"; "God is love"; "our Father"; "God is a Spirit." Friends, one's conception of God is a very good index of that person's character. One who looks upon the heavenly Father as close at hand, weighing every thought, gazing at every impulse, scanning each deed, and enriching every second of life, as One from whom nothing can be hid, and toward whom there can be no evasion,—such a one, who feels God in the beating of the pulse and in each breath drawn from birth to death, must be a different being, and must behave very differently from the one who believes that the Creator has nothing especially to do with humanity, no particular care for anybody, and simply lets us alone under the government of laws as old as creation, that were once wound up and never need to be noticed again.

So, also, one who looks upon God as a tyrant must govern daily conduct very differently from the one who looks upon him as the personification of all goodness. Let us look at each person that we know; and can we not find out by scanning the life closely just what such a person thinks of God? Is he or she hard-hearted, exacting, censorious, asking no favors, and granting none? And is he or she all ice and all iron? And do you avoid that man or woman when you can, and always meet that person with dread and with shame? Then the Maker that such worship is strict justice, unstreaked with mercy,—a Being demanding the payment of the uttermost farthing, and One who has no ear for penitence and no heart for pardon. Again, is the person that you know liberal in mind,

generous in construction, free in charities? Does he or she always look on the bright side? Is he or she more willing to excuse than to blame, and continually full of sunbeams that make all within reach overflowing with hearty joy and a holy delight? Is he or she one whom everybody loves, and who loves everybody? Then the Maker of such a person must be a glorious Being, and must blend in His character all attractive qualities, such as win a way to the hearts of all people by their beautiful sweetness, sacred effulgence, and glorious majesty.

Yes: what we believe concerning God, Christ, and heaven, is very apt to be graven upon our daily lives; and I have sometimes thought we could see one's creed written upon the face,—at least we can often detect in this way whether the views are catholic or cramped, whether a person lives to enlarge the race or to enlarge self, whether such a person worships from love or from fear, and whether the future is all a paradise or all a prison. I can tell what sort of a God you worship, my brother and sister, after spending a day in your house or a day at your place of business, after weighing your home intercourse and your world intercourse, and after thoroughly searching your twenty-four hours' conversation and deeds; and during that time I would like to see you in sorrow as well as in joy, under provocation as well as under benediction, engirdled by strong temptations, and placed within the arena of a sharp spiritual conflict. Are you unmoved? Does your eye glisten with faith? Is your heart lustrous with devotion? Is your action calm, your voice sweet, and your self-com-

mand thorough? And do you march by the shoals and by the quicksands in your path with a noiseless, unshaken, and unterrified tread? Then your Creator is your Father, Friend, full of light ineffable, attractive in His character, and worthy of the deepest and holiest adoration. But are you uneasy, petulant, perverse, and inclined to yield to the pressure of evil for the sake of the gain, unforbearing, selfish, savage, full of complaint, madness, and profanity, entirely off your balance, and divorced from your manhood or womanhood? Why, then, the Maker you worship is probably a tyrant, and one we should all like to avoid.

Christian friends, although God is "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever," to each heart and to each mind He is, while we tenant the flesh, what each mind and heart make Him. Hence, while there is but one God, and He is one all good, yet each one has his own God; and, oh, what short-sighted creatures we are in our descriptions of Him, as one says,—

"From whom we spring, to whom we tend,
Path, Motive, Original, and End"!

The good Father, knowing how each mind would shape its own Maker and each heart make its own God, and unwilling to leave us entirely in the dark concerning Himself, sent to us, for our gaze and study, an image of Himself, a photograph of His character, and a representation of His attributes that we could understand. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, who is Immanuel, which, being interpreted, is "God with us." Jesus says,—we all remember the glorious words,— "If ye

had known me, ye would have known my Father also ; and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him." Philip saith unto him, " Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Jesus saith unto him, " Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" " He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?"

Therefore, friends, let us be no longer troubled as to the character of God, no longer complain of the mysteries that gather around His throne, and no longer plead ignorance concerning Him ; but study into the life, search into the spirit, and look lovingly upon the precepts of Jesus Christ, and then we shall find the Father, learn His will concerning us, and our fear will be changed into love, the mist around our head and heart will melt into light, our doubts will be all cleared away, and the relations of the Creator to the created will be very beautifully, grandly, and clearly unfolded.

XXII.

LONELINESS.

“I am left alone.”—ROM. xi. 3.

EVERY true person needs to be sometimes alone, and no character can be richly developed in a crowd; for all important self-knowledge must come from quiet, undisturbed, and solitary meditation. View any of the greatest men of any of the ages that you may choose, and you will find that they had a large number of hours that were consecrated to loneliness; and also you will discover that many of their mightiest achievements claim as their starting point the ideas that leaped into their minds when they were by themselves, when the world was shut out, and when the study door was closed against all intruders. Nay, more than this. In our own lives, we can each of us easily see that to our solitary hours we owe a great deal of our present influence and power, material or spiritual. In the silence of our chambers we have meditated; and the echoes from such peaceful thinking will be heard through heaven and earth, in time and in eternity. It may be put down as a very safe rule that the greatness is false, weak, and foolish that always

seeks a crowd. Why, the man who is ever before the public, challenging notice continually, and dreading secrecy and seclusion, has no time to grow, and is all the time giving out, but never taking in, power, beauty, and grace. Yet I am willing to admit that there are some persons whose moral safety depends upon their being in constant society; for they need the human eye, a perpetual activity, and a constant dread of being found out, that they may be kept in the paths of peace and holiness. And they are perfectly trustworthy as long as you never put them under the care of simply their own company; but, when you leave them alone, they slide away into terrible darkness.

These exceptional cases, however, do not vitiate the general law; for in the long run, with a majority of persons, it cannot be gainsaid that solitude is absolutely necessary for the body, mind, and soul.

Again, all of us have to be alone in some of the deepest realities of our discipline; for there are experiences which no other human being, however near or precious or loving, can possibly share with us, and there are trials, pains, sorrows, and vague dreams of the impossible, the burden of which only our own hearts can bear. In some sense, indeed, we are all of us strangers; while those whom we think that we know the best, very frequently are but very little known to us, as we shall find out at the day when all secrets are made manifest. One thing is sure, though: everybody is much better than we ever dreamed; and we each of us have aspirations, hopes, and intense longings which we are afraid to reveal, but which absorb our very life,

holding captive almost all the powers of the mind and the soul.

We cannot tell about our holiest dreams,—no, not always to husband or wife, to father or mother, or dearest friends ; for they seem too sacred to be unveiled, too tender to be touched by foreign hands, and sometimes in too secret, beautiful, and splendid affiliation with the gate of heaven to be jostled by human comment or shadowed by mortal exposure. In the hour of affliction, too, we seem most estranged from the human race ; for then, as never before, we comprehend how little others can feel that which touches us so keenly, and this is the reason that consolatory words so seldom embrace the deeper places of the heart, while they so frequently seem empty, vain, and hollow.

When we ourselves are about passing into the Eternal City, it will be a lonely time ; for we cannot take our property with us, nor our family, nor our friends, nor anything familiar. A little one once said to her father, “Father, when you die, I suppose you will take some of your books with you.” Ah ! her young mind could not comprehend the loneliness of the last hour, and the wrench that must be made on the human side.

No, we shall take nothing with us then except the spiritual body ; and not anybody can we send in our place. We can buy substitutes for a war, we can hire laborers for special work, and we can choose agents to represent us in many of our daily calls ; but here there is no shuffling, no substitution, and no buying off, for there is no discharge in that war, and we must go alone, leaving father, mother, wife, children, and all

behind. Oh, if families could only die together! we sometimes feel, as we behold these terrible separations; and yet we shall know hereafter why our hearts are left so long to bleed.

We shall be judged alone. Face to face before Almighty God we must stand, with all our virtues and all our sins; while our sins, I fear, will send a shadow over the little good that we have done, and we shall say, with a true humility, God be merciful unto us.

Yet, friends, despite all I have said in the face of it all, and although it may seem to contradict it all, I would assert that none of us need be alone in any of the experiences of life or in any of the vicissitudes of time or eternity; for every one of us can have a constant Friend forever, if the desire for companionship be strong, clear, and holy. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find." We have spoken of the great character that is formed in loneliness; and yet no character is grand, great, beautiful, and holy that does not choose this Friend of whom we speak, while our solitary hours are good for nothing, and are worse than nothing, without his blessed, gracious, and precious aid. In that room where you seem to be alone, there must be One present with yourself, or you are not safe. I have said that all have to be alone in some of the deeper relations of our experience. Yet here I would now say, No one can be safe without that Friend, who just at such times wants to be with the tried heart; for by his quickening power our aspirations, hopes, and longings become grandly crowned, while the nucleus is planted in the anxious heart, which will be sure

to result in a splendid victory. In the hour of affliction, he, the Helper, is the only one who can really comfort us; for, unless we lean upon his bosom and hold his hand, we are indeed bewildered, and only when he says, "Lo! it is I, be not afraid," "Lo! I am with you alway," "Let not your heart be troubled," "Come unto me," "I am the resurrection and the life," with other truths equally grand, massive, and holy,—only then do we begin to see light, feel peace, and gain strength. So, too, in our own last moments, what is to save us from our loneliness and from the crushing weight of isolation but the presence of this Friend, with his supporting arm? Hold of his blessed hand, we shall not be afraid to cross the narrow stream, and we shall not tremble as we enter the heavenly gate. Before the Judge, too, why need we fear, if we have tried to do our best, if this dear One be with us to plead our cause, extenuate our weakness, and reunite us to the gracious heart of God? This Friend,—ah! you know his name. It is Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our Redeemer. How lonely he sometimes must have felt! and we naturally ask ourselves, when we think of Jesus: Where could such a person obtain sympathy? Who could enter into his feelings? Who could sound his powers? Where could he look among men for any one able to understand him? And where could Jesus find a bosom companion? The best man living would be vastly below him, and those who loved him with all their hearts could the least help him in his hours of sadness. He may perhaps have thus talked with himself: I am alone, and those the nearest to

me are yet a great distance off ; for my mission is not for mortal to comprehend, and to whom can I communicate my inner life, to whom can I whisper my greatness, and where is the bosom on which I can rest ? Then comes the response in his breast that breaks so sweetly out of his lips : I am not alone,—no, not deserted,—for the Father is with me. Man may not understand me, I seem to be an alien in the world ; but I have God at my side,—God, the Maker of earth, man, and all things. So Jesus was not alone,—thanks be to God for that !

“I am left alone.” There is a deep sadness pervading these words, and they have a kind of music like a dirge, while they do express a certain state of the soul of all the children of God. One may say that God and Christ are very near, may be beautifully comforted by the thought of a heavenly companionship, and may be stirred by the idea that tens of thousands of angels are on all sides, and yet may feel bereft, fearfully stricken, and under the sense of the utter absence of human companionship ; for we want man or woman near to us, and, however much we may love God and Jesus, we crave somebody here who shall understand us as well as somebody in the Celestial City. Oh, let some one as frail as ourselves take us by the hand, and seize affectionately our heart, yet how seldom we get a full earthly companionship ! Who could clearly enter into the large heart and brain of a Moses, or a David, or an Ezekiel, or an Isaiah, or of any of those mighty men of early years, whose thoughts and deeds rose so high above the crowd, and swept upon the world like a

breeze from heaven? Who could stand by Copernicus or by Galileo, and grasp in full their giant minds, enter into clear and holy communion with their royal spirits? Some time ago the writings of Seneca fell under my gaze; and so grand, sweet, pure, and heavenly did some of his sentences seem that the heathen appeared to have been transfigured, almost wearing the garb of one of the disciples of Jesus. Now where was the Roman who could be a companion for Seneca? Could Nero, or any at his court? Could the priests, who were full of idolatry? Could the common people, who thronged the streets, careless of life and regardless of its end? No, no! he was deserted. So with us all; for with all our Christianity, with all our faith, and with all our looking forward to a blessed immortality, there are times when we are crushed by a sense of complete isolation. Similar is each one's experience to that of a traveller who should enter some great but deserted city. The buildings are there, streets beautifully laid out, parks ornamented with statues and filled with fountains, and everything is seen that is grand and suggestive; but no human being is anywhere to be found, no one to hear his voice and no one to answer his questions. Ah! what an awe would creep over this traveller, what dread would seize him, and what cold chills would twist, freeze, and overpower his heart!

But, friends, in each of our souls there is a great city that is full of grandeur, while we are the only ones privileged to walk its streets, visit its homes, and gaze at its magnificence; and no being is present but ourselves. Ah! these mysterious strugglings of the

soul, these bright gleams of light, and these inward palaces, parks, statues, and fountains,—who has not seen them, felt their blessed presence, and mused over their strange intimations, and yet who can declare their full, glorious, and sacred meaning?

“I am left alone.” Yes, you are left alone, while you should not be sad under the thought, but should grow strong by its mysterious pressure; for you are left alone, that you may the better meditate upon God and His glory, upon Jesus and his love, upon the Holy Spirit and its cleansing power, upon all heaven and its beatitudes, upon duty and its sublimity, pain and its mighty suggestions, and upon death and its sure immortality. You are by yourself, that you may get strength by which you can help others to grow strong, so that over all hearts you may be able to pour a blessed stream of light, peace, and glory.

Learn, then, the great lesson of solitude, secure the mighty prize that it offers, and finally receive a holy consecration for persistent and glorious fidelity.

“I am left alone.” No, again I say, not alone, for Jesus is with us all, and will help us all, if we seek his blessed, uplifting, and elevating aid; and so let us each say, in the words of the poet:—

“Jesus, my Saviour, look on me!
For I am weary and oppressed.
I come to cast my soul on thee,
Thou art my rest.

“Look down on me, for I am weak;
I feel the toilsome journey’s length.
Thine aid omnipotent I seek,
Thou art my strength.

“ I am bewildered on my way,
Dark and tempestuous is the night.
Oh, shed thou forth some cheering ray,
Thou art my light.

“ Thou wilt my every want supply,
E'en to the end, whate'er befall.
Through life, in death, eternally,
Thou art my all.”

XXIII.

GOD KNOWS.

“The Lord God of gods, he knoweth.”—JOSH. xxii. 22.

IT is a great satisfaction when we feel that there is one Being who knows everything. After some great perplexity, some dark hour, and some mysterious visitation, when there seemed to be no clew to an event, no interpretation arching it, and not a spark of illumination about it, it is a blessed relief, both to our mind and soul, when we feel that somebody knows about it, that somebody can understand it, can thoroughly sift it, and will in good time bring out its illuminated side, and reveal the spiritual diamonds so long concealed in darkness, sorrow, and grief. Though mortal be lost in query, and nature be ever so dumb, God knows, and, if God knows, that is enough; and why need we be troubled, for the whole affair rests in good hands, and the issue will be, and must be, well, grand, and glorious. He who made the stars, forced them into place, balanced them so beautifully, set them so thickly in the skies, and clothed them with such holy brightness; and He who filled the earth with all its attractions, sprinkling it with gardens, spotting it with forests, setting upon it huge mountains, like a picket guard, to ward off its

foes, refreshing it with cool breezes and delightful showers, and charming its landscape with brooks, rivers, and oceans, thus saving it from dying of thirst, and filling it with animated beings, who for use and for ornament should adorn and consecrate it, and sending at last mortals into it, that they might gain happiness, strength, peace, and a sound and a holy culture,—He, our God and our Father, knows.

Knows what? The uses of things,—why the world was made, why we were made, the meaning of the events that greet us, what lessons they convey, what benedictions they unfold, what promises they hold out, and how much culture we shall gain by them, and what they want to do with us and do for us; knows all about life,—why it was given, why it is prolonged, why it is taken away, and what becomes of it after it has gone from our earthly sight; understands heaven,—where it is, what it is like, who live there, what they are about, how they look, how they are clothed and all about them; understands time,—its limitations,—and eternity,—its length; ay, comprehends everything, from the smallest insect that crawls at our feet to the highest archangel in the Celestial Kingdom. The fate of God's children, the destiny of kingdoms, and the duration of the world are all clear to that eternal wisdom that can never get dark, nor cold, nor lost. No surprises, no defeats, and no accidents with God; for He has one grand plan, one comprehensive scheme, and one sublime arrangement, taking centuries for growth, it may be, requiring innumerable pains for discipline, and yet working out results in splendid conformity to

His holy and blessed will. Friends, can anything be more cheering than this fact, and is there anything strange about it? Strange that the Maker should be familiar with what He has made, wonderful that the Architect should understand all about his building, and peculiar that the Creator of the world should comprehend what He has produced? How is it in every-day affairs? Would it not be wonderful if Mozart and Beethoven did not understand their own music, stood apart from it as strangers, and were unable to comprehend the science of its melody? or if Powers stood before one of his statues dumb as an idiot, and unable to give an account of how it was shaped into its wondrous beauty? or if Rubens stared at one of his own pictures with a vacant gaze, and with a total inability to trace out the preparatory steps that led to its execution? Then is it not very natural that the great Musician of earth and heaven should be able to explain all the grand chorus of the ages, that the holy Sculptor of all time should be able to describe every particular of His work, or that the great Painter of both worlds should, with a keen wisdom, delight in His own magnificent paintings?

I come now to my second proposition, that grows out of the first,—we do not know. Here we find two parties in the Christian Church. One says, "We do not know anything, and never can know anything"; and the other says, "We do know something, but that something will not amount to much until God reveals more knowledge." I confess, I do not think that, in order to exalt God, we must utterly extinguish our-

selves. Should we think, in this world, of declaring our appreciation of any one by abusing the works of such a person? Should we call Raphael a great artist, but at the same time ridicule his Madonna? Or should we call Webster a great statesman, and yet sharply criticise every "State paper" he ever wrote? No, never. We identify the works with their author, and we show our respect for both together; and so, reverently, as we look at each human being, let us speak of his nature, knowing that God made it, and of his capacities, knowing that God gave them.

If I say that a human being is utterly incapable of ever being enlightened, has no power, and is bound irrevocably to sin, with no chance to escape, you may very properly ask me, "Who could have made such a being as that?" And you may just as properly conclude that it must have been a Being for whom no great and mighty affection could possibly be felt. I make no qualifications here; but let me be perfectly understood. That moment that we declare the infant as devoid of all possible reception of good, as free from all propensities to right, as covered only by sin, and as gravitating naturally to evil, why, that very moment, we cast aspersions against the Maker of that infant; and we are uttering a most terrible judgment against ourselves. But, because we can do something,—ay, many things,—and because we are something,—ay, much,—it does not follow that we can do everything or that we are self-sufficient. No, never. God made us, and therefore we are not failures; and let us not for a moment suppose that God has made a mis-

take in our creation, but, because we are *made*, we are dependent, frail, and we must often and always look to our Creator for aid and blessing. I say it reverently, God has not made us gods, but He has not made us imps, and there is a great deal of which we are all ignorant; and let us not be ashamed to confess that fact every day that we live.

As I hold my hand and count off the beats of my pulse, while with the precision of a watch they mark off the little span of my life, I am willing to own that I cannot see what makes the motion so punctual, so patient, and so persistent; and as I talk with you now on these high themes, toward the solution of which talking does so little, I cannot see how the air so cordially embraces my lips, nor how my lips and tongue become such amicable partners as they bargain with the mind for something to say, taking a license from the will for the power to say it, and then by some stratagem manage to steal into your ears, and to lodge, I hope, somewhere near your hearts. I cannot see how these things are done. It is more cunning than the sleight of hand of the magician, and it is more sublime than any of the stupendous works of nature; and yet it is so common that we hardly stop to consider the wonder, glory, and beauty that adhere to it. Again, here we are, billions of people in the world, with the same features, but every one has a special look; and how could the Divine Sculptor have accomplished that?

So I might go on, citing cases without number where we have to confess our short sight, our weak-

ness, the poverty of our mind, and the emptiness of our heart.

Yes, we are engirdled by mysteries, we are swimming in a sea of fog, and we are just as poorly off as once seemed little Moses on the Nile in his "bulrush ark." Yet is it not something that we can by the grace of God think, talk, write, walk, and live? and can we speak meanly of one who can do all these things? No, I would not speak disparagingly of a brute, much less, unless I were foolish or mad, would I malign man, —man with his wonderful body that is so intricately and so powerfully shaped, with his splendid brain, the cathedral where birth is given to so much inspiring music and to so much priestly thought, and where ideas in such stately and sublime procession march into light; man with his imperishable soul, that has so much of the divine in it and has been so illuminated by the grace of God. Can we speak slightly of this massive work of Heaven,—a human being, a man, a woman, a little babe, so unconscious and yet so mysteriously attractive? Forbid it, Father! Make us humble, but do not let us be ungrateful. Make us penitent, but show us what we can be if we choose, God helping. Unroll the chart of our possible destiny, and teach us—oh, teach us!—the ineffable grandeur of that sentence of Scripture which announces that man is made after the image of God.

As we look at history and at historical results, it becomes very evident that all through the past ages there has been a providential plan. If we made ourselves Romans, Grecians, or Hebrews, and if we threw our-

selves back thousands of years, we should hardly understand that some of our greatest trials were to prove such a vast benediction to after ages. We could hardly believe that our decay would prove to others life, and that every pang we suffered, both as nations and as individuals, was in accordance with the great, glorious, and holy scheme of Providence. What would be called in ancient days subjugation, invasion, and a despotism, has since proved emancipation; while the baptism of blood then offered has resulted in the salvation of the future. When the Vandals and Goths were overrunning the fairest portions of Europe, and were making their name a terror to multitudes, very few, I suppose, could then see any beneficence clinging to the visitation, could detect any marks of a good God overlooking the calamity, and could catch any light from the window of heaven that would soothe distressed hearts. But how is it now, as we measure the results? Do we not see that civilization used these rough men for its own purposes, and compelled them at last to bend in subjection? And do we not see that their visits were needed, just as tornadoes, earthquakes, and thunder-storms are needed, in order to clear the air, to settle the atmosphere, and to stir up a new spirit in stagnant hearts? I suppose, when the Pilgrims started for America, there were a good many who called them hard names; who exclaimed, The experiment is a foolish one, and those undertaking it are mad; who cried out, What! leave a home of so many comforts and desert so many friends, just to explore a wilderness and to encounter the tomahawk? Such was the talk

in 1620; but what do you and I say now in 1888? When, only a few years ago, a certain number of colored people were sent to Liberia, that an independent colony might be formed there by themselves, where there would be no conflict of races, there were plenty of people ready to predict the failure of the movement, ready to call it visionary and mad; in fact, some went so far as to brand it as cruel. But look to-day, and what do you see? A large nation, industrious and happy, and fringing the coast of Africa, who are destined in time to civilize that portion of the globe that is so little known, but is becoming better known every year, that is so rich in soil, minerals, and everything that makes a country valuable and attractive.

Friends, time explains a great many things that we do not understand to-day; and events always prove that He who rules the heavens and the earth is never bewildered nor mistaken nor vanquished. As one has said,—

“His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour.
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.”

Let each one of us take our own personal experience, and trace it back, and see what we wanted to do, and where we wanted to go, when God would not let us do it, and when God held us back, and when God seemed to be working against us, and how does the retrospect look with our present experience? Did not God know best? and has not everything come out aright, and was it not well for us that years ago a restraining hand was

placed upon our pleasures, appetites, and desires? And is it not better that we were turned aside from the road that we desired to travel?

I think one of the bewitching attractions of biography rests in the fact that we often detect what appear to be very slight and very trivial matters changing the whole course of a person's life. Washington gave up going into the navy, in order to please his mother; and thus a hero was secured for America, and a splendid monument of goodness and greatness for all the world. Franklin started on a journey to Philadelphia, as a mere pauper, and went under false promises to London; and thus a philosopher was educated for all time. The eyesight of a Prescott was suddenly eclipsed, but out of that darkness an historian was born, whose sweet rhetoric will always prove a fascination and a culture. Yes, the slightest incidents that we call disappointments are often the turning points in our experience, and prove the very moment when Heaven interposes, and shapes us for ends more consistent with the will of God. Thanks be to the Father, we are not left alone in this labyrinth of life; but the voice often comes, clear, and strong, and beautiful, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

Let us turn now to the Master, our dear Lord; for he, throughout all his experience, well illustrates our subject. As we trace his history during his thirty-three years' pilgrimage upon the earth, there is a great deal about it that is distressing and dark. How much he suffered in the body, how much he was misunderstood, and what trials of the heart he had to endure! His

own family ridiculed him, his own disciples deserted him, his own nation put him to death; and can God be looking on, and see his only Son thus treated? We feel, as we gaze at the scene, like exclaiming, There is no hope, no light, no peace, and no promise! But stop a moment! We must not stand looking all the time at the cross,—grand and glorious and consecrating as such a gaze is and must be,—but we must look further and look deeper: we must see the resurrection and the ascension, and we must count the echoes that leap out of that holy life and those sublime teachings. We must know what Christianity has done, and what it will do; and then can we doubt God's knowledge, and do we not feel that the Infinite One knew what was best?

Certainly, the life of Jesus is best calculated of all lives to show us the impotency of all our human surmises and of all our earthly definitions of success. If we had lived in the days of our Master, very few of us, I fear, would have been his disciples; for we could not have seen our way clear, and the whole popular voice would have been against such a choice, and all our early prejudices would have urged us to keep quiet. We should probably have exclaimed, Why follow him? Is he not obscure, an enthusiast, without power? and does he not choose his friends in such a way that he never can grow great? Why should we follow him? But, ah! what poor seers we should have been, what miserable philosophers, how blindly we should have read the signs of the times, and what a fatal mistake would have been ours!

“God knows.” I have taken the words of the apostle

for our lesson to-day, in order that we may bind them upon our hearts, and thus fortify ourselves against all surprises and all defeats. And God grant that we may rest contented because He knows, and thus become consecrated, illuminated, and saved. The poet says:—

“Thy way, not mine, O Lord, however dark it be.
Lead me by Thine own hand, choose Thou the path for me;
Smooth let it be, or rough, it still will be the best;
Winding or straight, it matters not, it leads me to Thy rest.
I dare not choose my lot, I would not, if I might:
Choose Thou for me, my God, so shall I walk aright.
The Kingdom that I seek is Thine, so let the way
That leads to it be Thine, else I must surely stray.
Take Thou my cup, and it with joy or sorrow fill
As best to Thee may seem; choose Thou my good or ill.
Choose Thou for me my friends, my sickness or my health;
Choose Thou my cares for me, my poverty or wealth.
Not mine, not mine, the choice, in things or great or small,
Be Thou my guide, my strength, my wisdom, and my all.”

“God knows.” Thanks be to God that the knowledge is in such good hands, and that the power and desire to help and bless are always allied to that great wisdom. Oh, how faith loves to believe that, and what lofty inspirations we gain from the thought, and what strong endurance, what holy piety, what noble hopes, and what gushing affections will enrich our minds and our souls when we are comforted, sustained, and consecrated by the thought of God’s omniscience! We are safe, we are happy, we are crowned; and nothing can hurt us nor disturb us nor break us down, for “*God knows.*”

XXIV.

THE DEATH OF THE YEAR.

“As yesterday when it is past.—PSALM xc. 4.

THE past! This word is full of suggestion, rich with power, and stirs up the deepest depths of the soul. Since the day that Adam and Eve appeared, a history has preceded us all, we all have had the privilege of looking back, have had ancestors, and an ancestry of deeds that we might scan, interpret, and weave into our discipline; and all nature, revelation, and intuition have brought their beautiful, holy, and uplifting contributions to our souls. Even Adam himself could look behind, not upon men, but upon epochs, geological formations, and wonderful convulsions of hundreds of thousands of years, as some scholars of the present day assert, or at least upon days and nights full of commotion, changes, and growth, as all will allow; and so the first man began to exist with a history that might buttress his mind, evoke his curiosity, enlarge his soul. And this fact, being day by day more developed, demands our philosophical, grateful, and loving search.

How many races of people have risen up, grown strong, and become famous, for centuries challenging

admiration, and then, in a very short time, have passed away, to be remembered only in story! Romans, Persians, Greeks, and Babylonians, and thousands of others, have to-day startled the world, and to-morrow have faded out of sight, existing only ever afterward in the sacred corner of memory. To-day, a Cæsar crosses the Rubicon, a Xerxes views his hundred thousand dependants, a Cyrus steals a march upon a carousing monarch, and an Alexander or a Philip bends in subjection myriads of kings; but to-morrow, the inevitable to-morrow, a Brutus puts out of sight the consul and would-be emperor of Rome, six feet of land enclose the ashes of a Xerxes, Cyrus has passed on to his account, and an Alexander and a Philip are only names used by foolish nurses that children may be terrified into obedience. And yet to-morrow facts are inaugurated into existence, woven into a past, and built up into a monument,—facts that must be sifted, studied, and consecrated, so that the to-day may be rightly improved, blessed, and redeemed. Ancient customs also that have ceased, but that in their day were admirable, noble, and suggestive, are to be examined.

What if an oracle at Delphi, that gave the fitting response to every question that was put to it, seem incredible! What if foolish incantations over the bones of the dead, that were supposed to give birth to miraculous cures and to strange inspirations, are to-day pronounced absurd! What if gladiatorial games, the servile state of woman, cannibalism, and all the curious ways of those who preceded us, to-day seem unreasonable, cruel, superstitious, and afford no grounds for

belief! Are they not full of instruction, and do they not let us somewhat into the freaks of the brain? and open they not somehow crevices into human nature, which it would be profitable for us to explore?

The ideas that have flourished in the ages that have ceased, grotesque, sad, and insane as they may seem, such as the assertion that the world was balanced on an elephant, that there is no such thing as substance, and that what seems to be material is only a thought of the brain, or that a man is only a highly cultivated animal,—all these fantastic ideas of those who have gone before us, who firmly believed them, are related to us for our education, are a sort of inlet to us on the way to truth, and shed a light on the road that we must travel; and so we are to live in, to brood over, and to search into the nations, customs, and thoughts that have finished their record, and thus shall we gain for ourselves strength, light, and grace for coming days. And there are ever memorials of the days bygone continually before us; and they plead for their own time, and claim a friendly, earnest, and holy study. These memorials we may classify under the general names of statues, buildings, books, nature, and men.

When one generation wishes to talk with another generation, one of the most usual of ways is to embody what is to be said in a marble or stone pillar that is suitably engraved, that can tell its own story, and convey with itself hints sufficient to call out the curiosity of future generations. All through the Old World are to be seen these stony epistles, and in our own land we are just beginning to appreciate this method of com-

munication; and thus is the philosophy of one period transferred to another period through the monument of a philosopher, or statesmanship through the monument of a statesman, or philanthropy through the monument of a benefactor, and so on forever. And future generations stand gazing at these shafts that loom into the air, and from the man look into the principle; and from the principle observe the age where it was published, and thus become, by a natural chain of cause with effect, intimately connected with scenes that are thus reborn, proclaimed, and cemented.

Buildings that are erected that they may brave time and storm, and as a sort of telegraph to myriads unborn, are encrusted speech preserved for articulation, when the day of utterance is almost a myth. The ruins of Pompeii, St. Peter's Church at Rome, some broken stones at Tyre, a few relics in Jerusalem, some of the pipes underneath the ground of the Eternal City, and some of the ruins in Athens,—ay, these and many other things, attest to the truth that we would advance; for scattered all over the world can be found the embalmed echoes of those whose dust has mingled with the air that we daily breathe, or has even been incorporated into our own frames.

Next, let us look at books, through whose blessed aid we are taught continually to think. Enter any library, and with what tones does the atmosphere all around vibrate! What chanting from the centuries is there! what choruses from choirs that were once under the guidance of a Mozart or a Beethoven; or what deeper music from master-hands like Milton or Bacon or

Shakspeare! A sensitive mind is almost bewildered in a place like this; for volumes become to such kind of minds like persons, and the room appears actually crowded with antique authors, publishers, and saints. Books are issued every year for the three purposes of educating the present, enthroning the past, and sending a message to the future. How beautifully these three purposes are blended in the great Book, the word of God, where all times, customs, nations, and thoughts are gathered together, consecrated and preserved in print! Thus we converse with Adam, and Adam speaks to us.

Nature, also, has a curious way of connecting us with the earlier times of the world; and this fact a student of geology or astronomy or mineralogy or botany, or of all the sciences, well knows. The mastodon and the fish, embedded in a rock, attest to this truth; and the oak under which many children have been sheltered, and the stars upon which Abraham looked, indorse eloquently our words. There is a history in light that travels so many miles, or in the very earth that we tread, that had its being almost from the beginning.

Again, man speaks for that which long ages preceded him. We do not mean to refer to the legend of the wandering Jew, who has been seen in all parts of the world so many hundred years, and who will not die till the Jews are re-established in their chief city, nor to the belief of many learned men that we carry about with us in our frames the dust of people who ceased to exist thousands of years ago; but we refer to the truth that, in every age, some persons live to be a hundred

years old or more, and that through these persons the ages are all linked together, so that, with the requisite data, we could trace back an unbroken link by these relics of each century to the days of Genesis.

Thus God, by many ways, treasures up for us the occurrences of each year, and proves to us that He wishes that we should gaze very devotionally, earnestly, and gratefully into "the yesterday that is past."

Now, what are the influences that start out of history?

They lodge in two words: gains and losses,—the gains suggesting to us helps on our course, with such improvements as we may choose to add, and the losses acting as beacons to warn us against dashing against rocks on which other persons have been wrecked; and thus, by sifting the doing of other days, our life is strengthened, the dangers threatening us are to some degree dispelled, and the mysteries overhanging our paths are better understood.

Once more, the interest that clings to everything connected with our early history, increasing with our growth and hallowing our lives, is an added testimony to the value of yesterday. The home of our boyhood, the friends whose familiar faces no longer greet us, the school-house or the church where many joyous or weary days have been spent, and the airy castles that our verdant imagination has built,—all these things we delight to consider in our minds or to reconsecrate by memory's aid; and such references to the hours that have ceased, if not dwelt upon morbidly, will serve us well in the upbuilding of spiritual longings for that world where no changes can possibly come.

Again, while we maintain that there is a close connection between the ages and one unbroken chain from the days of Genesis till now, we must also bear in mind, and distinctly avow, that each age has its own history, its own part to play, and something peculiar to itself, very grand and very beautiful,—something that cannot be mingled with anything else ; and we are to allow that one year cannot rightly be compared with another year, since each day has an original record not to be transferred. In the Old Dispensation, we find one period patriarchal, another prophetic and another poetical, and in the New Testament we find the varied changes peculiar to certain times and to no other time ; and so in all history, from the first century till the present hour. The one who, with caution allied to philosophy, casts his eyes upon the past witnesses both unity and diversity,—a unity of growth, but a diversity of methods, and the varied methods as peculiar to varied seasons.

When we all are uplifted to the bright world, and view the earth with our vision cleared by celestial light, while in one gaze thousands of years are marshalled to sight, these truths will forcibly impress us : how every event has a place, how every era its sign and its power, and how free from all confusion all providential arrangements have been ordained.

Sometimes you find people who deem a study of the past a useless employment. Let history go, they say, but press forward, and no matter about religion's growth, they maintain ; for the more important step for us to take is to become religious. No matter, they

assert, about the Jews or the early Christians; for the whole life should be given to the continued training of our own hearts, and our whole mind should be engaged upon the query, What shall be done next? while such people cite Saint Paul's words as favoring their views, when he says, "Letting go the things that are behind." There is enough of truth resting in these statements to make them appear plausible. It is well for us to march on. We should not be encumbered with any burdens. Our mistakes we should not brood over nor magnify, else our advance will be impeded. And yet, all these things being allowed, there is a place for retrospect; and the apostle certainly proved the fact when he exclaimed, "O wretched man that I am!" when he referred to his earthly life, when he often represented, in a vivid manner, the changes that had intersected his life, when he described his education at the feet of Gamaliel, his journey to Damascus, his ascent to the third heavens, the perils through which he passed, the dangers by land or by sea, and all the vicissitudes that so painfully, peculiarly, and wonderfully fell to his lot.

We are cautioned against making retrospect a burden, but never against converting it into a profit; and hence the whole argument of the Bible chiefly rests on this pivot, that antiquity must be searched, otherwise how are we to know anything about the Bible itself, since that only exists as a record, the pages of which were transcribed ere our first breath was taken?

To Christians there is a yesterday peculiarly endeared, on account of the occurrences that adorned it,—the day of Christ's life when his words of wisdom were

spoken, when his miracles were wrought, and when, in his own daily deeds, he embalmed his precepts ; and without this yesterday blank would be our hope, sad our hearts, weak and weary our footsteps, the grave an awful prison house, and the future too terrific to be measured or expressed by language. But, with this glorious past, a holy glow spreads over our pursuits, our fears depart, and our look toward the unknown shore is calm, holy, and triumphant !

Yesterday has passed,— its joys and its sorrows, its virtues and its sins, and all its wonderful changes,— and the time has passed so quickly that we did not heed its passage ; but the work assigned to it has been accomplished, and our performance, be it fruitful or worthless, has left its mark upon it. And, whether our influence has been for good or for evil, God only knows.

There is, then, a suggestion, an encouragement, a warning, and a promise resting in the words of our text. The suggestion is that the time, as it goes, must be freighted with our good thoughts and deeds. The encouragement is that a merciful Father, who remembers that we are dust, scans with mighty pity the fleeting hours. The warning is that our sins leave a stain behind them that never can be erased. The promise is that the faithful endeavors that have adorned our history, as we enter heaven, shall gain for us the “ welcome ” that is so powerfully described by our Lord in many of his most interesting parables.

THE SELLING OF OUR BIRTHRIGHT.

“Esau despised his birthright.”—GEN. xxv. 34.

THE Scripture scene is thus portrayed by the sacred writer: “And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison; but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up and went his way, thus Esau despised his birthright.”

The first-born among the Jews, in the early ages of the Hebrew Church, had peculiar rights. Some of the privileges that are mentioned by historians are these: “From the eldest male child, it was expected, the Mes-

siah in due time would appear in the world. The first child given was entitled to a double portion of the parents' property. He had pre-eminence and authority over his brethren. He had the privilege of offering sacrifices in the family. All these rights were violated by crime, or might be set aside at the will of the father, in his final blessing, which was viewed as a sort of testamentary bequest."

But Esau sold all his rights, in order that he might gratify his passions, simply that he might obtain something to eat; and, because he was hungry, he threw aside the grand dignity of being referred to as the ancestor of the Messiah, gave up the financial advantage of being the best served in the division of the paternal estate, relinquished the ambition, pleasure, and glory of being the ruler of the house and the priest of the family, and threw all these gains aside, simply for a small dish of peas, a little lump of bread, and perhaps also for a mere cup of water. Our first thought is that he must have been insane. We cannot really believe that he could coolly enter into such a disastrous bargain as that; and we have also a solid contempt for Jacob because he took advantage of his brother when he was in such a doubtful condition of mind.

Again, as we look a little deeper into the account, while we blame Jacob just as much, perhaps a little more, for his wicked and not by any means fraternal shrewdness, we see also that Esau was considerably in the wrong, and that he was not quite so weak in intellect as we at first supposed; for he knew well enough what he was about, and he felt very sure that he offered

an enormous price for a poor dinner. But he argues with himself thus: Why need I care? I am starving, I shall die; and what use will my advantages be if I die? It was a deliberate bargain, cautiously made, in what was supposed by a diseased imagination to be an extreme case, and just such bargains have been made ever since, are made every day; while I, for one, am very much obliged to the writer of Genesis that he has given to us, in the very twilight of history, a scene that has its lessons for all ages and for all time. All Christians have a birthright, and so, too, they are very apt to part with it for a trifling bribe; and, that they may secure personal comfort for a brief period of time, they will surrender the best interests of the soul. It is by the right of our birth in a Christian land, because we are brought under Christian nurture, and because the blood of thousands of believing ancestors tingles in our bodies, that we take the name of our Master, and that we are at once enrolled under his standard. As a Mohammedan is born a Mohammedan, as a Hindoo is born a Hindoo, and as a Jew is born a Jew, so, in a certain sense, a Christian is born a Christian.

I take this ground, that every child that is born of Christian parents is a Christian child; for what else shall I call the babe? Or, what is better, far better, what does God call him? Baptism, which in my mind is one of the most important rites of the Church, is the public announcement that the child presented is God's child, a disciple of Jesus, and one surrendered to the full control of Heaven. But, say some, if we are born into the love of God, into discipleship to Jesus,

into all the glories of revelation, splendors of nature, and possibilities of greatness and grandeur that can be conceived, how is it that so many go astray? And how is it that so many remain forever in sin? I allow the universality of sin, for, in fact, it is so universal that no one can deny it, and so deeply seated in every heart that it cannot be covered up; but this allowance, however, does not hurt my argument in the least, for there is no such thing as sin without a previous virtue, without a something to sin against, and we must first be good before we can possibly be bad.

If we have all sold our birthrights, it is a very fair supposition that we had a noble thing to sell that was our own property; for we could not well cheat the arch-fiend himself by a pretended ownership in a valueless estate. We commence life virtuous, or, rather, innocent, with a large capacity for virtue; but we are quite apt, however, before we go far into life, to sell our capacity for any of the baubles of the world that the tempter may choose to present. We easily traffic it off for an hour's pleasure, glittering wealth, and great fame. We forget that we possess the pearl of great price. We know not what a treasure was ours till we are smarting under its foolish loss, and, like Esau, we have our weak, empty, and wicked excuses for our foolish surrender of such valuable property. Let each one ask himself or herself, For what have I sold my birthright? Have I sold this precious boon of God for an hour's pleasure; and, if so, why? We may thus excuse ourselves: The temptation was great, the prize immediate, bosom companions were looking on

and were cheering us on, we felt that life was short, and that it was ordained for enjoyment, and we thought that it was foolish for us to lose a good opportunity when we were young, hearty, impulsive, and thoughtless. We knew, we exclaim, that what we wished to do was not exactly right; but we were aware that a great many did the same thing, and also that they stood high in society notwithstanding, and were applauded by many who called themselves virtuous. We called our very appetite for the forbidden pleasure a justification for the license; for who could blame, we argued, but the bigot, or the cynic, or the man who, when young, committed the same sins, but who had now become too old to remember it, and too much of a hypocrite to confess it? And so, on reasoning as shallow as this, we yielded our birthright, and, for an hour's pleasure, we received a stain upon our souls, the scars of which can yet be seen; and the moment that we yielded we and Esau became very nearly, strangely, and sorrowfully connected.

Again, have we bartered off our soul's gift in order to secure vast possessions? If so, we probably excuse ourselves thus: Abundance brings hosts of friends, myriads of comforts, a glorious leisure, great power, and mighty influence. Ay, it is good to help churches, extend charities, and build up civilization, so that, in order to get a large estate, we pretend to maintain that one may deceive a little here and there, have a granite heart, slightly forget the beatitudes, and all this price is nothing, provided the end desired is reached; and therefore we will throw into the mill that grinds out

our coin our honor, judgment, affections, ay, recklessly, all that we have.

Again, one wishes to be famous; and so, in order to become so, he relinquishes the chartered rights of infancy, for such a person argues thus, it may be: What is the use of living unless we can live to some purpose? How can any one live to a purpose without notoriety? And how can one become extensively liked, vastly influential, and really a power in society, without a slight sacrifice of principle, a twisting of the truth, and a little covering up of the conscience? If we live in the world, such exclaim, we must conform to the world, must not be too nice in our criticisms, too strict in our views, and too puritanical in our habits; and, in order to be called a first-rate man or a first-rate woman, we have to graze against Bible precepts, and for influence, for extensive influence, for a commanding influence, we have to keep heaven a little in the shade. Thus many weakly reason, and thus they sell their birthrights.

Ah, my friends, have I overstated the case? As we review our past lives, are we not convinced that many a time we have made poor spiritual bargains, and that we have often sacrificed character to convenience, duty to inclination, many precious opportunities for honors, prizes, and glories that are both fleeting and useless? As we look back, are we not surprised how foolish we have been, and do we not see how many sacrifices we have made in order to secure mere phantoms of the air? As we gaze upon our lives, we are never satisfied with anything that we have done that was wrong; and, while our good deeds loom up with glorious radiance, noble

opportunities improved seem golden as we review them, and spiritual diamonds collected are prized with great joy. Not so do we think of idle hours, wicked thoughts, and unholy ways, for these all look black as night, and they have no beauty about them, while we wonder how they could ever have worn such attractive garments; and, if we could make our lives all over again in a minute, we should make them all virtuous, and then we should desire to die before the glory had departed!

The picture of the artist was always to my mind one of great, massive, and holy significance; and it cannot be too often described. The story is somewhat like this: A stranger gazed upon the painting of a child that represented a beautiful boy. He had an angel face, with mild, beaming, and spiritual expression which called out the richest and the deepest thinking, and which made one feel very holy and very near to heaven. Perhaps the stranger thus talked with himself: Such a child as this portrait represents will make a good, great, and glorious man; and many will be the hearts that he will cheer, holy will be the influence that he will shed. He will go about like his Master, doing good; and when at last, in the course of time, death claims his body, vast will be the train of mourners that will go about the streets, and hushed will be the tones of men as they speak of the departed. Bells will toll, and crape will hang upon the human arm or, what is better, will drape the human heart. Children will weep, they know not why; while parents will feel that one great benefactor, one holy example, and one brilliant light has been quenched. So the stranger buys the

painting for a talisman, and hangs it upon his parlor wall, and daily looks at it for comfort, joy, and peace; and he cares not for whom it was taken, as long as it evidently represents a child of God.

Years pass away, and the stranger grows old, and the painting has become valuable as a memorial of the past. All at once, circumstances call the owner of the picture to the same town, and the very place where he purchased the prize; and, while there, he hears of one who is to be executed for theft and murder. Out of the kindness of his heart he visits him, and then learns, to his astonishment, that this assassin, this midnight prowler, and this confirmed sinner is the very person whose childhood was so pure, whose splendid infant face he had prized so much, and whose picture had so entranced him for years. So overcome was he by the discovery that, before the execution of the criminal, he had his face taken again, and when he reached his home he hung the two pictures side by side: the innocent child, the angel boy, and the little cherub; but, right opposite, the old sinner, the dilapidated criminal, and the blood-stained convict.

My friends, to one of those pictures I point as the representation of each one of us when we have our birthright in our own keeping, consecrated to our own use, and destined for our coronation; and to the other picture I point as the representation of those who have lost their birthrights, who have sold them for ashes, and who have parted with the divine image that was stamped upon them in infancy. May God, through Jesus Christ, help us to keep our birthright! What

shall God say to us, as we enter the other world, if, after He has sent us here clothed with such grand possibilities, bearing the angel mark, with souls capable of such a grand revealing, we yet deliberately rub out our sacred history, deny our divine relationship, and leave life so covered with sin that no one can recognize us as belonging to or as having any relationship with that infant who was baptized with our name, and who stood in our place?

How did Jesus treat his birthright, and what does his example teach us? The birthright of Jesus was one, of course, peculiar to himself, since he was ordained to become the Saviour of the world; but the way in which he met the call that was made upon him is worthy of our special study. I suppose that it is well understood by all who are in the least acquainted with the state of the times in which Jesus lived, who are conversant with the tone of thought then existing, who have sifted the tyranny of the Romans, weighed the expectations of the Jews, searched the rabbi's prophetic interpretations,—I suppose such understand that Jesus could, in a worldly sense, have become a very great, rich, and popular man; and I am inclined to think that, strong as the Roman government then was, he could easily, with the power that was placed in his keeping, have given to it a fatal wound, if not a complete overthrow. The enthusiasm of the Jews was at the highest pitch; and all that it was necessary for him to do was simply to say to the Hebrews: I am the King predicted. Bring your arms, get ready for battle! I will lead you. God is with us. The tyrants will be over-

thrown. And all the force that he would want was ready for him, and the people only waited for the call to war; and he might have placed himself on the throne of the Cæsars, and thus have governed in time the then known world. He knew what he was able to do; but he spurned the temptation, and exclaimed, "My kingdom is not of this world." He knew what he could do; but, what was better, he knew what he ought to do, understood the very obligations of his birth, and chose, at the call of duty, to give up royalty, power, wealth, and glory for temporary suffering, poverty, disgrace, and seeming death. He knew that the honors of this world did not amount to much, that they were short-lived, and that they perished in the using; and he also knew that truth was eternal, and that the one who carried out his God-given nature would always, however dark the struggle and painful the discipline, exert a holy influence, and shed abroad a righteous fragrance.

So we, my friends, ought to study into what God would have us to be, and we ought to know the rights, glories, and sanctities of our birth, and we should fully understand what God has made us capable of becoming; and then, with no faltering step, with no false pride, with no unworthy fear, we are to march on the road to duty, come what will. We are to march on, with an angel countenance, with prayer on our lips, with the Bible in our hands, with God and Christ in our hearts; and we are to march on, although scorners laugh, sinners mock, and battalions of fiends attempt to overthrow us. Never, oh, never, let us despise our

birthrights, and ever and forever let us call them sweet, precious, and divine; and, when we come to pass from the mortal to the immortal, may our birthrights still be with us, so that, as we appear before God, He may see that the great trust committed to our keeping has not been bruised, shattered, and destroyed!

XXVI.

WALKING WITH GOD.

“ Enoch walked with God.”— GEN. v. 22.

IT is a great thing, a sublime privilege, a comfortable benediction, and a glorious consecration, when one walks with God ; although very many people prefer to walk with somebody else until their last sickness, and then want just such a companion, while they express sincere remorse that they have neglected such blessed company to so late an hour. But Enoch, wiser than such persons, walked with his heavenly Father continually,—morn, noon, and evening, in the beginning, middle, and end of his being,—so that, at last, he found himself translated all at once to the Celestial Kingdom ; and let us go and do likewise.

Let us walk with God at morn. Oh, a religious childhood,—how beautiful, grand, and sublime it is ! Nay, is there not something strangely unnatural, sadly repulsive, and terribly mournful in a youth of sin ? Do we not expect all our children to be generous, noble, true, pure, and holy, so that, when they swerve even the least from the simplicity of innocence, a chill, a cold, icy chill, runs to the very roots of the heart, fills

us with an awful gloom, and throws us upon our knees in the deepest agony? No one likes to see a worm in the bud; for we all wish to have these little emblems of beauty and fragrance and sweetness just as attractive as possible, and removed from everything that trespasses in the least upon weakness, decay, and wrong. Of course, a boy will sometimes be a real boy, and a girl will be a real girl,—playful, roguish, a little disobedient, and at times wild, very wild; here and there and everywhere where danger seems pre-eminent, sending a jar to our nerves, upsetting our patience, keeping us in a fever of discontent, and often making us right up and down excited. But we cannot expect these little women and little men to be complete saints; but we do expect, we have a right to expect, and we should never cease to demand, an underground of holiness, a foundation of righteousness, well-established principles, a tender conscience, a pure imagination, and a real hearty and holy reverence for celestial mysteries. A thoroughly wicked child makes us hang our heads in shame, while a whole community cries out against the men or the women who try to make children wicked; and all this goes to show that we assign to childhood a peculiar relationship to goodness, holiness, and peace.

To the young, then, I say, with peculiar earnestness, Fulfil the high calling of your royalty! Do not try to mimic the follies of your elders, even their pardonable weaknesses shun with all your strength; and let it be known that you are priests in the temple, that you stand in the holy of holies, and that you mean, as long as God shall give you this gracious opportunity of ap-

proach to himself, to be true to your position, and honorably to discharge the duties that are incurred by the possession of such a sacred privilege.

Again, my friends, walk with the Father at noon. Do not think that because you step into active life you are able to go alone, for there never was a greater or a more fatal or a more sad mistake, as it is then the very time for aid, direction, inspiration, and comfort, such as a power more than mortal alone can give. Never are temptations so thick, sins so plenty, dangers so overwhelming, hypocrisy so rampant, and enemies of all kinds so massive, venomous, and deadly; and without a guide one is sure to be lost in such a fearful thicket of difficulties, so that all time is covered with the terrible wrecks of those who have tried by their own might to stem such a mighty torrent.

A young man goes into a store without the Eternal Guide; and he says, My honest face is a recommendation, my sterling principles will sustain me, my high sense of honor will be enough to keep me straight, while he is offended, and terribly offended, if any one says, There must be something more and something better, stronger, and holier. For a while everything goes well, for the tempter never springs his trap upon the victim till he is sure of the game; and he tries him with sweetmeats, honeyed words, and adroit artifices, in order to lead him gently on to destruction. Of course, the young man at the first drives back all the fascinations of wrong, holds his head high up against bribes, and stands upon his preconceived integrity. What! think to tempt me? he virtually exclaims; and

yet, before very long, the profits of sin outweigh the reasons against the performance, logic slips all on the weak side, principle reels in its socket, bribery becomes more attractive than a self-made virtue, while the appeal to stand straight, being no higher than self-interest, is driven aside, resistance is demolished, and your nice young man, your pattern young man, and he who laughed at a higher voice than his own will, is covered all over with shame.

Or the young girl says she is strong enough of herself, she scorns the idea of the necessity of any special religious help, exclaims that no one of good common sense need ever offend in any way; and so she tries the experiment, while the result is, as it must inevitably become in a case like that, a fearful failure. But the one who takes the higher Guide is armed at all points, so that no surprise ever causes a defeat. Nay, more: oftentimes one thus prepared, by the very sacredness of the panoply, keeps off temptation; and the tempter does not dare to come near to those who shine with the glorious brightness of the Mount.

There are those to whom no one would dare to suggest an evil thought or a sinful deed or anything of doubtful expediency; for something in the eye, manner, and voice of the favored ones keeps in a due restraint those who go about seeking whom they may devour. Then how much easier the intricate passages of life are passed, if some one goes with the inexperienced, who knows the way, can throw a bridge over all the chasms, and make the issue all glorious, inspiring, and beautiful. Thus anxiety goes to sleep, toil is sweetened, pain is

consecrated, ay, even death itself is lighted up with a radiance that is truly sublime. Who cares what each day may bring, if the elixir be carried in the heart which will change whatever comes into a blessing, and will keep all permanent loss, sorrow, and trouble at an eternal distance ?

As the followers of Mohammed rushed into battle jubilantly, because they believed that death would bring their souls into the most perfect bliss of which their uneducated hearts could possibly conceive, so the young man or the young woman, who has the true Guide, is ready for all things, because in everything he or she detects a hidden prize ; and they know how to wrest the diamond from its dark, unpromising, and secret grave.

Again I say to all youthful ones, and to all in mid-life, Do not work alone, do not face, all by yourselves, the fearful dangers that cling around the hours, do not lean upon pride, ambition, self-conceit, gold, nor upon anything material and perishing ; but have for a support something that cannot fail, and for a companion somebody that cannot change, and for a rescue a power that makes all other powers succumb, and turn pale, and turn away. Walk with the Almighty, hold His hand, and lean upon His bosom, trust in His promises ; and then all time and all eternity will be yielding you a blessing, and filling you with a peace, and covering you with a glory such as no mortal can possibly describe.

Walk with the Almighty at eve. In old age we need this heavenly encouragement ; for an aged person who clings only to the perishable is indeed a pitiable sight.

Ah ! can that forehead smooth itself out again ? Can those eyes become fully strong once more, and shine with fresh vigor ? Can those cheeks once again get the flush and fulness of youth ? and can the body regain a perfect health ?

There was once a fabled spring, in which all who entered found a renewal of their childhood ; but has anybody ever found the famous place, and have any of the vast army of impostors ever dared to promise a medicine that would take old age away ? No ! no ! And the decline of life, all by itself, with no upward look, fastened only to things of time, and knowing nothing but that which perishes, is something of which we do not like to think or speak or dream. But, if all aged ones have a support like Enoch's, then they have nothing to fear, everything to hope ; and, though the body fails, the soul grows young, beautiful, and strong, and, although the outward man sinks, the inward man is renewed. Yes, all aged ones need God. As earth fades, as friends of former days depart, as recollection becomes the foremost faculty of the mind, the present, as it were, being buried with the past, as peculiar customs arise, new faces spring up, changes innumerable take place, as sight gets dim, hearing hard, motion an effort, and even speech a fatigue, then, oh, then, what shall the aged ones do, unless the pilot, the everlasting pilot be on board the boat of life, and points to the Eternal Shore, and unless the great " I am " shall fold the wearied ones to His blessed heart, and shall grant to them a perfect peace ? Earth, with such a support, may recede, objects fade or alter, friends change or

disappear, strength decline,— it matters not, oh, no, it matters not ; for the Eternal Arm will save, bless, and re-create. One has beautifully said as she gazed at all the different periods of our lives : —

“ Walk with the Lord at morn,
When every scene is fair,
While opening buds the boughs adorn,
And fragrance fills the air.
Before the rosy dawn awake,
And in thy being’s pride,
Thy first young blush of beauty make
Omnipotence thy guide.

“ Walk with the Lord at noon,
When fervid suns are high,
And Pleasure with her treacherous boon
Allureth manhood’s eye,
Then with the diamond shield of prayer
Thy soul’s opposers meet,
And crush the thorns of sin and care
That pierce the pilgrim’s feet.

“ Walk with the Lord at eve,
When twilight dews descend,
And nature seems a shroud to weave,
As for some smitten friend.
While slow the lonely moments glide
On mournful wing away,
Press closer, closer to His side,—
His arm shall be thy stay.

“ Even shouldst thou linger here,
Till midnight spreads its pall,
And age laments with bosom drear
Its buried earthly all,

Thy withered eyes a signal bright
Beyond the grave shall see ;
For He who maketh darkness light,
Thy God, shall walk with thee."

But, my friends, if we will walk with God, He will walk with us closer and ever the closer, as we the more and the more need His blessed presence, grace, and care ; and this is the beautiful thought that God will walk with us in our joys, making them each day more bright, holy, and sending a perfect constellation of stars in the horizon of our experience. He will walk with us in our sorrows, so that magnificent rainbows shall arch them, by which our faith will shine with a diamond splendor. He will be with us in every event that greets us, so that all the items of our lives shall be glorious gifts of power that are showered down upon us from the Eternal Throne. Oh, how fortunate we are to be so attended, glorified, and blessed ! But who will place the Father's hand in ours ? Who will lead us to the King of kings ? Who will, for a while it may be and perhaps forever, stand in His place, being His perfect image and representation ? And who is it that has brought heaven so near, made eternal truths so real, poured such holy light upon us from the Celestial City, and opened the peace of God upon our weary souls ? A voice out of the skies replies, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" ; and another voice out of the Scriptures speaks, "I and my Father are one" ; and still another voice, all sweet, solemn, and consoling, "Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." How

can one help exclaiming, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief"? If Enoch walked with God, so much more did Jesus; for he has been called "*Immanuel*," which, being interpreted, means "God with us."

Let us, then, keep very near to Jesus; for thus and thus only shall we secure all the armies of heaven as workers in our behalf.

XXVII.

THE TRUE SELF.

“Look to yourselves.”—2 JOHN 8.

VERY few people are willing to allow that they are selfish, and yet the number is quite large of those who are glad to label everybody else so; but, in making such a charge, we are apt to forget that the accusation, like a rubber ball, may sometimes bound back, injure our own hearts, and leave a dent upon our own characters, since the easy transfer of a wrong to a neighbor, the application of abusive terms to those around us, and the looking out for flaws in somebody else, are very apt to be clear indications that we may possibly have gone astray in the same direction. “Each one for himself” is the motto of almost everybody in the world; for the child is taught it as soon as he begins to think, and the old man repeats it just on the brink of his departure. And from youth to age, through city, town, and nation, in cot and in palace and everywhere, each one unmistakably declares, if not from the lips, at least from the life, that each one’s duty is to exalt self in honor, wealth, power, and all things that are considered good. I feel, however, that this tendency, that is so universal, so applauded, and is such a

positive mark in the make-up of humanity, cannot be wholly sinful, must cover some deep truth, point to a great reality, and be the token of a fact stern, earnest, and vital,—a fact that concerns us all, opens some of God's dealings with us, explains some of the precepts of Jesus Christ, excavates some of the mysteries of the soul, and clears away many of the obstructions which clog the true road to glory. In fact, we cannot live very long in the world without finding out that every wrong suggests a right; for right and wrong exist by contract, and their life depends upon their opposition, and each recalls the other,—as theft, honesty; falsehood, truth; impious, pious; and so on.

We ask you therefore, at this time, to view selfishness in two ways; first think of its sad side, and then see if it does not have somehow, by a holy, noble interpretation, uplifting and splendid suggestions; and we would also ask you to look at the impossibility of selfism, to sift the philosophy of it, and to find out, as far as you can, how Jesus robed the self in glory, by a transformation, enlargement, and glorification of its meaning; and we desire to maintain, too, that the great study, work, and thought of man must be self, with the noble interpretation, in the richness of its best reference, in the might of its truest power, in the solemnity of its responsibility, and in the glory of its tremendous destiny.

"Each one for himself," as a motto for life, when viewed on its sad side, explains many of the difficulties that harass us all, day by day; for families are disturbed by such a principle, honesty is involved, cities are polluted, nations are embroiled, and the best part of all of

us is smothered. Cæsar, Alexander, Napoleon, might have been saints, had they kept the self in subjection ; and so, many are the wars that would never have been waged, and millions the homes that never would have been rent, had personality been concealed. In fact, the great key that will unlock all the mystery of crime, and explain or attempt to justify all the follies in the earth, is that word "selfishness" ; for in that expressive term are coiled up the furies who make their excursions from time to time, to desolate the earth at the mandates of temptation. "I want," "I must have," and "I will have,"—ah ! these words enfold, in the forces that they create, the havoc that they justify, the hearts that they break, a sad picture, which makes the blood run cold.

Many of us, also, are tutored in childhood to think much of our own powers, are often told to aim at greatness, and to try to obtain, in some way or in any way, public favor, honor, and applause, because otherwise existence is said to be a failure ; and we are urged to seek wisdom, but only that admiring crowds may some day surround us,—or to cultivate a spirit for trade, but only that the might of our coin may increase our influence and our comforts. Or, if our tastes are toward the arts and the sciences, we are urged to copy a Newton or a Fulton or a Franklin, but only that their fame may be somewhat borrowed, and that our names, like theirs, may bound over time and be gratefully mentioned on the lips of all true thinkers. With these incentives in our early days, when earthly glory is made to eclipse the heavenly, and when fame and a name are paraded before us as terms more befitting than consecration and

eternity, what wonder that our soundings are all homeward, that we never drift away from our own harbor, and that we draw perpetual drafts on the world for our whims, wishes, and wants! And as exclusiveness is our legacy, what wonder that we appropriate it! or is it strange that, when our day is ended, we bequeath it? This is no modern fact and no new-fangled notion, for it is the history of the ages; not a necessity, but a terrible habit of the race, that is not likely very soon to die out, for everything favors it.

The glorious division of the world into families,—a clanship that angels bless,—and the marshalling of families into cities, towns, States, kingdoms, empires, all grand, noble, and divine, if rightly viewed, purely examined, and with a Christian spirit greeted, when wrongly understood, or impiously received, or sacrilegiously accepted, have driven the whole world into conflict, and have thrust the “I,” the “mine,” and the “ours” into unholy, fearful, and overwhelming prominence. Home, so blessed, dear, sacred, and heaven-like, has, by man’s sad reception of it, often become the very opposite, and has been changed into a citadel, or turned into a fortress, or worked into a battlement, out of which unceasing and deadly bullets fly, scorching, vexing, and smothering a neighborhood.

So, also, cities, States, and kingdoms, that, rightly viewed, ought to be peaceful, useful, pure, happy, and a joyous blessing to those inhabiting them, when an undue stress is placed upon individual rights, when too great prominence is given to personal prowess, and when law is too strictly regarded at the expense of mercy, have be-

come pests, scorpions, plague-spots, and historic warnings, the dread of man and the sorrow of God. View Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, and myriads of other places that stretch across history, bridge space, notch time, and utter their everlasting, ever gloomy, and ever terrible protest against all selfish wrong! We must then allow — or give up history, surrender eyesight and insight, crush revelation, put down all judgment, and dismiss all thought — that there is a side to selfishness that is sad, that explains all the horrors of sin, that clasped our ancestor's thought and action when he partook of the forbidden fruit, and that has descended to us and is passing on to generations yet unborn, a sad side that we should strive with all our powers to root out, by our universal supplications, vigorous sacrifices, consecration to duty, and every honest effort of lip, arm, and life, or, if it be demanded of us, by our willing, jubilant, and speedy death.

But we have already admitted, while we are never to forget, that which we have too seldom remembered, that there are noble suggestions nestling in this personal seeking, and that there is a sense in which each one must look out for himself or for herself, and that our duty to God, our relations to Christ, and our affiliation with each other demand this personal work of all of us. We are to find out that, when we truly, nobly, and splendidly care for ourselves, then we are most sincerely generous to others, are the greatest benefactors of the race, and send holy telegrams all over the earth and all through heaven. We are constantly to remember that, when we truly build up our own characters, then we are

creating the lever that will help us to uplift the world. Our healing must begin at home; for every inconsistency in the heart that we check is a donation to the world. Each one's work must be a home-work, and the inward life is developed only on the grounds of perpetual self-reference; but the spiritual hero becomes so, not only by his tuition or by his intuition, by his observation or by his reflection, but by his outgiving, which proves the richest income, and by his self-sacrifice, which results in the giver's coronation.

We grow by expression, expansion, and charity. Our honors are built over a neighbor's gratitude, and we truly live by helping others to live. Thus we make the world ourselves, thus heaven is created in our breasts, and thus our vital happiness rises out of the thought that we are pleasing God, Jesus, the angels, and our fellow-beings. This is the true way of enriching our own store,—not by building our fortune over another's cries, wants, shame, curse, and despair, but raising the temple of character over another's abundance, love, purity, and thanksgivings, that some service of ours has caused. Howard, Wilberforce, Oberlin, Fénelon, and all men of that stamp, are those whose main care was and is for self; but such have made self the poor, lame, blind, diseased, sick, and the dying, and such are those who have converted the self into the all, who acknowledge no being but universality, and whose throbs beat time with the heart-throbs of the whole world.

We have learned a great lesson, when we thus define ourselves, when we thus establish our dignity, and when our self means all the people who need help,

peace, comfort, and love. The idea with the true soul is not to get to heaven, but to live heaven, so far as possible, to make heaven, to spread celestial light everywhere; and those seeking enjoyment in this manner please themselves, but they also please Almighty God.

It is this spirit of sacrifice that is no sacrifice, because it is the heart's delight, it is this giving that is no giving, but taking, and it is this love universal, and yet particular, and it is this spirit of outspending and investment that leads to the building up of our asylums, starts homes for the poor, shelter for the aged, retreats for orphans, and counsel for the sick and dying.

The reconciliation of brotherhood and the unity of humanity, all one in each other, and all one in Christ and in God,—ah! here we have the grand doctrine that must be learned, preached, and lived. When we lose our identity only to find it enlarged, to see it binding continents and blessing want and woe in all places, then we understand very clearly what kind of self-glory God blesses, and then we see how we can make ourselves mighty by consecrating our strength to the world and to heaven. And then we detect how the holiest marriage service between our souls and all souls can be majestically celebrated, so that there shall be a unity in diversity, and so that the widest service can be reduced to a beautiful simplicity.

Again, my friends we are to bear in mind that selfishness on its sad side is impossible save in motive. Our ideas may be all hostile to generosity, our plans a curse to the race. We may really mean to assert our independence, we may desire to stand up alone and

unprotected, and we may say that we are capable of managing our own powers and our own gifts without loaning or selling or disclosing our accomplishments,—yes, this may be our plan; but we cannot carry it out, for we are so made that we must communicate. We can retain nothing in our grasp; and in time all that we have and all that we are will be found out and appropriated. Such is the law of life. Action must be somewhat generous, and outgiving is a necessity. Now, I contend that the noble view of ourselves is an earnest yielding to this inevitable law, a rejoicing in it, a lifting it up to the highest eminence, and a raising of it to the purest atmosphere, by which duty is made a pleasure, a fact becomes a glory, and God's law becomes our law, life, and peace.

Many volumes have been issued since the genesis of the world that are pervaded with a gloomy view of man and goodness, that are thoroughly saturated with sceptical doubts and morose fancies, that assert that all men act from personal motives, and that sneer at all pretensions to benevolence, all encomiums of charity, and all benefactors. Wisely and weakly have these sages argued, mixing truth with falsehood, blending imagination with reality, and uniting their shallow deductions with the deepest, strongest, the most glorious common sense. Such exclaim: Everybody works for his own honor! There is no goodness that is not a barter. There is no virtue that is not an investment; and there is no holiness that does not expect a large per cent. on its capital.

Be it so, let us reply, not as you mean it,—*never*,—

but as God means it; not in the restricted sense that you assume, but in that glorious sense which, throughout the whole life of Christ, is implied where the world is dwarfed to a unit, and where this beautiful unit magnifies itself till it becomes the world. With this view, our Saviour's history becomes richly illuminated from the manger to the grave; and we discover the majesty of that self-ennoblement which took the shape of self-sacrifice, we notice the brilliancy of that life that measured eternity in its grasp, we rejoice at the might of that wisdom that reduced to oneness believers of all ages, and that uttered that startling but comforting prayer, "that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." Jesus magnified himself, and for this reason he resigned the glories of heaven, became like a man, lived, preached, suffered, and died; but he defined himself, as a vine with many branches, and thus he took within his personality the believers of all ages.

"Look to yourselves." The words of the text are a solemn exhortation, and they demand self-scrutiny, call for the deepest watchfulness, and will admit of nothing save a boundless philanthropy and a love unscorched by care or pain or abuse. We are called upon to wake up to the duties of every day, to keep ourselves armed against temptation, to live each hour as if it were the last, and to be in constant harmony with heaven and earth, that thus we may always be the source of light, wisdom, and strength to all around us, find our truest peace, richest growth, and mightiest power in our unceasing benefactions. Thus and thus only can we

grow grand, beautiful, and sublime. For the poet says:—

“The simplest flowers, with honeyed sweetness stored,
The smallest thing may happiness afford ;
A kindly word may give a mind repose,
Which, harshly spoken, might have led to blows ;
The smallest crust may save a human life ;
The smallest act may lead to human strife ;
The smallest touch may cause the body pain ;
The slightest spark may fire a field of grain ;
The simplest act may tell the truly brave ;
The smallest skill may serve a life to save ;
The smallest drop the thirsty may relieve ;
The slightest look may cause the heart to grieve ;
The slightest sound may cause the mind alarm ;
Naught is so small, but it may good contain,
Afford us pleasure, or award us pain.”

XXVIII.

SPIRITUAL ARITHMETIC.

“Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?”—MATT. xix. 27.

WHAT shall we have? That question sounds very natural, it is just what we might have supposed that the disciples would have asked; and very likely, you and I, had we been there, would have asked the same thing, for people are very much alike in all ages. Of course, these Jews were anxious to know whether the sacrifices that they had made would be richly rewarded. They really desired to find out whether they had given up their religion, friends, and their all for nothing or for something worth securing, and for a rich harvest that would prove a glorious remuneration for all trouble, and they were rather in a bad situation, unless they could see something better in the future; for they were exiles, traitors, outcasts, and deniers, and they were judged, by the majority of the people of that day, as fools, madmen, and knaves. They had left an honored religion, given up home associations, and forsaken daily avocations for a wild and a roving life, for a couch on the ground and the night sky bending over them, and for the privilege of living on a begrudged

charity ; and they had done all these things in order to become followers of One who was rejected by men, whose name was a reproach, and whom the leading Church had rejected. Thus far it had been all loss, shame, and agony with them and they could not help asking : How is all this to turn out ? What shall we have by and by ? Is there to be no end to our giving up ? and shall we not at some time receive honors, comforts, and rewards ?

Poor creatures ! They expected a great deal, and had earned a great deal ; but their chief mistake consisted in their misapprehension of the nature of the Master's kingdom. If they had really understood Jesus, they would not have spoken of sacrifice, thought of pain, and desired to peer into the future, but would simply have kept on working, waiting, suffering, enduring, and being misunderstood, till the mystery was cleared up, the veil was lifted, and the Apocalypse was disclosed. They took worldly views, and wanted their pay while they lived, and wanted it in the shape of wealth, position, and power, for they thought that such things must of course produce happiness ; but they made a very common mistake. Having and being, possession and character, show and substance, are two very different things, for what is given to us or what we make will never, of themselves, do us any good ; but the most important thing is what we are. The disciples, if their minds had been spiritually illuminated, would have asked, not What will you give to us ? but What will you make us ? And they would not have said, Money, power, and fame, but they would have said, Grace, truth,

and redemption. We all look at what we have rather than at what we are, although the one is external and limited, while the other is internal and everlasting; for what we have will perish, but what we are is forever imperishable. When one dies, the very common question is, How much did he leave? But the great, vital, and the all-absorbing question should be, How much did he take with him? For it is no matter what he was worth here, but it is all matter what he will be worth there. In our estimates of men generally, we look a great deal more at the external than at the internal. We are apt to say, Is he well-to-do? not Is he thoroughly good? Is he popular? not Is he pure? What does he have? not What is he in heart, mind, and character?

Ah! when will the time come when we can get behind the varnish of a man, and reach his real manhood? When will the time come that respect shall be rendered only to a man's true self, and not to the bag that he carries with him? And when will a man's chief desire be not to leave a large fortune when he dies, but to carry a large fortune at that sacred hour into the Eternal Kingdom, a fortune that shall be shaped in the spiritual coin, that will pass unchallenged in the banks of heaven. If the disciples could have seen what was really coming to them throughout the ages and throughout eternity, they would have been satisfied; and if they could have fully understood what their influence was to be up even to the present hour, and what honors also were awaiting them in the Celestial Land, they would at once have shouted their Hallelu-

jahs, and, if they could have been allowed a long view, their immediate pangs would have been gladly met.

Christian friends, do we not have here a direct, uplifting, and pungent lesson for our own hearts? Why do we spend so much of our time in complaint, and waste so many precious hours with our worries? And why will we not rest content with the thought that everything that God orders will turn out well at last? Let us each one say to ourselves, when we are perplexed, Although I cannot see the end of this difficulty, and although there seems to be no end to it, yet there is One who will clear up the darkness, straighten out the intricacy, unravel the web, and bring all things into glorious issues.

Ah! we must all of us take long views. Our little span of life is nothing, and that by itself may seem to be a failure; and, do what we can, although we do it with all our might, with an honest purpose, and with a good heart, we may seem to do nothing, and yet we are accomplishing a great deal, for we are helping on God's great plan, we are working out the Father's glorious purposes, and the time will come when we shall see that our labor has not been in vain in the Lord. No earnest prayer, no devout thought, no kind word, no generous deed, and nothing that we do from a high, lofty, and holy purpose, is lost; for all these tell their story, work out their destiny, and have their glorious echoes, while some day, to our joy, we shall count up the grand results. Those disciples seemed to be working in vain, but they were building up the Christian Church, they were blessing you and me; and

billions of hearts hold them in reverence, and thank God that they were born.

“What shall you have?” do you say, dear followers of our Lord? Why, your names shall be spoken with a tender respect by all Christians throughout the land, your letters shall be read with a holy earnestness, your lives shall be scanned with a devout regard, you shall have our admiration, gratitude, love; and the book where your biographies are written, your labors are sketched, and your spirit is displayed, shall ever be treated by us with a sacred, tender, and beautiful regard.

“What shall we have?” Well, what do we want,—for that is the test question,—and are we willing to take what is sent, and to call it a blessing in whatever guise it may appear? We ask for wealth, but God may see fit to send us poverty; and are we willing? Or we ask for power, and He may send weakness, and we crave fame, and He may send shame and trouble,—ay, He may send just the opposite to what we desire; and are we content?

We can never be just right, nor feel just right, nor stand just right with Almighty God, till we are content to take what is sent, and to receive the gift so meekly, gratefully, patiently, believingly, and triumphantly that it shall reveal its sweet, holy, and gracious benediction. Suppose that Christ had answered the disciples just according to the level of their own thoughts, and had said: What shall you have? Why, some of you will be crucified, some will die by the sword, some will be hanged, some will be bathed in boiling oil, some will be

beheaded, some beaten to death, some flayed alive, and some shot ; while all, or nearly all, will be constantly maltreated, be covered with shame, and die by violence. How they would have started as they gazed at such a sad catalogue of their future ! What a check to their anticipations such a promise would have been ! and what a numbness would have fallen upon their hearts ! But Jesus thought best not to harrow up their feelings, but to carry them beyond their dangers to their glories, and beyond their cross to their crown.

“ Behold, we have forsaken all.” Well, that all could not have been much ; for the disciples were none of them very comfortably off, as far as this world was concerned. In fact, almost all of them were rather in straitened circumstances, and you may smile, perhaps, when they speak of their all ; and yet, if they gave up everything that they had, even if they possessed but very little, it was quite as much of a sacrifice as if the richest man of whom you have ever learned consecrated the whole of his property to the Church. For the widow’s mite was the largest gift ever bestowed ; and the renown of it nearly nineteen hundred years have not quenched.

However, the disciples gave up a great deal simply because they supposed it would prove a good investment for them so to do ; and their diseased visions beheld thrones, gold, purple, fine linen, heaps of vassals, and all the paraphernalia of earthly greatness. But when they began to have a doubt about earthly gains, when the honors of the world were far out of sight and far out of promise, when a suspicion of failure crossed

their minds, and when everything looked dark, then, of course, they thought of what they had given up. They began to think that they had made a bad bargain, and they needed encouragement, and they received it, not as they supposed, but in a far better way ; for Christ said, " Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

" And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

I have nothing temporal to give to you, Christ virtually said ; and I did not come to make one man great, and another man rich, and to increase in any way earthly prosperity. But my rewards are more permanent, my honors are more everlasting, and my coin is more imperishable ; and, if you follow me, I have nothing to say as to what you will be while you dwell in the flesh. You may be lonely, obscure, suffering, and everything may go against you, for I do not concern myself about these small matters ; but I can promise you rest, peace, joy, opportunity, honor, and glory in the Celestial Kingdom,— the place where you will live the longest, and about which you should give yourself the deepest concern.

Many good persons think that it is very strange that they do not get along better in this world. Why is it, they say, that oftentimes the bad succeed and the

good seem to be wrecked? and what does this great inequality mean? They might as well ask why the rich man of the parable fared sumptuously every day, and why Lazarus was condemned to eat the crumbs at his door; or why Nero was surrounded with earthly pomp and with gorgeous splendors, and Saint Paul at the same time a prisoner at Rome. Our destinies in this world are not worth mentioning, when they are compared with the vast cycles of eternity; and the longest human life is like a flash of lightning when measured with the endless years with which every true soul is crowned as a birthright. And do not tell me what a man enjoys or suffers here, for that is not worth mentioning; but tell me, if you can, what he will be there, in heaven, with God, Jesus, and the angels. Does great here always mean great there? Does rich here always mean rich there? Does poor here always mean poor there? Does God take up our earthly estimates, and say that they are grand, inspiring, merciful, and just what they ought to be? No, not always; for the scale of rank in heaven is different. There the internal, not the external, is weighed; and there character, not mere reputation, is considered. But, friends, if we forsake all and follow Christ, we should do so, not because we are encouraged by the goading of ambition, or driven by the pressure of our fears, or looking for rewards, or fearing loss, for we are to love Christ for himself alone, and not for what he promises nor for what he threatens; and we ought to follow him, because he is altogether lovely, because he so attracts by his gentleness, wins by his tenderness, and dazzles all who gaze at him by his

transcendent purity. Yes, we are to follow him because we cannot help doing so, because our eyes will turn that way, and because our hearts will not let us be traitors.

There is a legend in the Church that a woman was seen running through the streets of Jerusalem, with a pot of red-hot coals in one hand and with a cruse of water in the other hand ; and that, when she was asked what she wanted to do, she replied, With the water I am going to put out the abyss, and with the fire I am going to burn up heaven, in order that man may love God for Himself alone. This legend sets in clear light the truth that we wish to illustrate ; for we must not be good simply because we want to go to heaven, or because we fear, if we are bad, that we shall be lost. Ah, no ! for that would be simply a matter of calculation, that would be a mere mercantile bargain, and that would be utter selfishness. We must forsake all, if need be, and follow Christ ; and we must let nothing stand between us and him. That proud desire we must give up at once, without a parley and without a compromise ; that darling sin we must relinquish, though habit has made it so desirable and so delusive ; and our creature-comforts we must banish, that obscure our vision of righteousness, although for a while we shall feel lonely without them. Yes, we must let everything go, if the demand should be made, provided we can lean on the Master's bosom, catch his voice, press his hand, and feel very sure that he will always claim us as his own.

We must forsake all ; but what is it that we have

to forsake? Certainly, nothing good, useful, and pure, for there is nothing to be given up that really makes life desirable, profitable, and joyous, and everything innocent we may keep; and all that we are asked to yield is simply that which we are better without. The Christian life has been spoken of too much as a forsaking, and thus many have thought it repulsive; for that life is no loss, but it is all gain, and it is no real deprivation, but it is all coronation, and blessedness, and peace. Do we think that we must give up everything in order that we may become Christians? No: we must not relinquish anything except our darling sins; and everything else we may keep, consecrate, and enjoy. We may keep our merry souls, but we must make them melodious with goodness; we may smile as much as ever, but all the time a Christian illumination must enrich our mirth; we may be as successful as possible, but everything that we have must be baptized with the light of heaven. Yes: let us consecrate intellect, affections, property, and everything to God and to His Son; and then we shall have peace in this world, and we shall receive a joyous welcome as we enter the unseen home and the Eternal Kingdom. And then it will be said to us by the forgiving grace of Almighty God, "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter into the joy of your Lord."

